

First Missions – Spain

First Missions – Pioneering Workers – Spain

Spain

Revised May 2, 2023

**From talk by John Gunn, Overseer of Spain
to some Dutch Friends about 'the Truth' in Spain.
March 5, 2003**

Otto Kimmich and Sandy Scott were the first workers who came to Spain to labour in 1933. Three years later the civil war broke out and many Spaniards had to flee. A young lady in her twenties fled to France and got to know the Way. After the war she came back to Spain and could not return to France because the Spanish borders were closed. She did not realise that one of the Friends lived in the south of Spain, as well.

Basilio Alvarez* lived in Argentina, and in 1920 he got to know a brother worker, **Jack Jackson**. He learned English from Jack J. and Jack learned Spanish from Basilio. Later Basilio professed and went in the Work.

In 1951, Franco ruled over Spain, and there was an opportunity to go to Spain if you were from Spanish origin. **Basilio** went to Spain to preach. Catholics were in favour of Franco, and if you were not Catholic, you could not find a job. When people had plans to get married, they had to get permission from the priest. If you were not a Catholic, you lost your job right away. People were poor in Spain, and starting a marriage without having a job was very difficult. Basilio was often abused by the police when they found out that he was not Catholic. The Friends and Workers in Spain met in parks to have meetings during Franco's regime.

Sabino was a man who came from Barcelona. He studied philosophy and religion. That's how he knew a priest who lived near Basilio. Sabino also knew someone who repaired/fixed shoes. One day he brought back Basilio's repaired shoes and asked from whom those shoes were, because he could tell from the shape of the shoes that they belonged to someone who kneeled often. Basilio answered that they were his shoes. That made an impression on Sabino. Later Sabino accepted the truth and started to serve the Lord.

One of the Friends found a part of the bible at the age of 16. Bibles were very scarce in that time. He was very disappointed in the church. Two workers had a room at his aunt's place. The workers had started to have a bible study with the boys. One day the workers visited a lady who was listening to a sermon of a priest at that moment. She asked the workers: "What do you think of it?" And one of the workers looked behind the radio and under the radio and said then that he didn't see the feet of the priest who was preaching there. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation" (Isaiah 52).

In the south of Spain, many people are Catholic. People are bound by tradition. A lady decided not to go to the Catholic church anymore because she was disappointed. Later, she went to the Jehovah Witnesses and was also disappointed there. She prayed to the Lord and cried a lot. One day an advertisement put in the newspaper by the sister workers caught her eye, and she phoned them. It was at 12 at night where she was, but that isn't late in Spain. She spoke for one hour with one of the sister workers.

A certain Manuela wanted to get baptised, but she had to make up with her sister-in-law, who was also professing and coming to the meetings. She did it her own way and confessed her sin (that she was angry with her sister in law) and that she wanted to make it up with her.

Barcelona has always been the center of the work in Spain and it was the location of the first convention. Convention is a fairly recent event there, as it is in Greece. The years of persecution by the official state church in both countries made any kind of larger gathering impossible. They didn't have conventions in Spain until after Basilio died (1985).

The work in Spain and Portugal is combined together as one group, and usually the fields that contain part of Portugal also contain part of Spain. The languages are so similar that it only takes about 6-9 months to master one of them, if you already know the other well, so it's not difficult to switch between the two.

Portugal has a separate history from Spain. [Click Here](#) to read it.

SPAIN:

NOTE: In Spanish speaking countries, the preachers are referred to by the friends and by each other as "servants," whereas Americans use the word "worker."

When did the workers first arrive? **1933**

Who were the first brother workers? **Otto Kimmich and Sandy Scott** . They fled when Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936.

1936 List shows four brothers there: Reg Beer, Otto Kimmich, Minton Edwards, and James Boles.

1951 Basilio Alvarez (born in Spain, professed among the first in Argentina, and went back to Spain after WW2)

1954 List shows Basilio Alvarez, Manuel Gallardo (Argentina), Omar de Abreu (Uruguay), and Cándida Rodríguez

(Argentina). All four spent most of the rest of their life in Spain, although Basilio the only one who actually died there (Nov. 17, 1985, aged 82).

Who were the first sister workers? (not known for certain). Possibly **1954 Carmen Meana (1906-1996, age 90 yrs); Cándida Rodríguez (Argentina); Nélida Romera (Argentina)**

Who was the first to profess? (info needed)

Who was the first native to go in the work? **There are a number of native-born Spanish workers. Two have died in the work thus far: Carmen Meana and Vicente Salido.**

When & Where was the first meeting? (info needed)

When & Where was the first baptism? (info needed)

When & Where was the first convention? **Barcelona** (They didn't have conventions until after Basilio died in 1985)

Where is the convention currently held? **Barcelona and Madrid**

Who have the Overseers been?

Sandy Scott (Scotland)

Basilio Alvarez (died 1985)

Omar de Abreu (Uruguay) turned oversight to John Gunn in 1993. He stayed in Spain & Portugal until 2002, when he returned to Uruguay. He passed away there in 2004.

Current Overseer: John Gunn (Scotland but had spent many years in Chile prior to going to Spain) from 1993 to present.

***La Vanguardia Nacional
(A Barcelona Newspaper)**

**Wednesday, February 26, 1986
Barcelona, Spain**

His name was **Basilio Alvarez**. They called him "don Basillio". **He died last Nov. 17th, at 82 years of age, in Sabadell**, in the humble home of family friends. No news media spoke of him. No officials attended his burial. They never knew him nor knew of his death. He was, however, the one who bore the responsibility in all of Spain of a peculiar religious belief. To say it in a more graphic way that he would have rejected, he was something like an "episcopal conference president". He was truly someone important, not only for the responsibilities that fell to him, but also for his extraordinary personality, for the depth of his faith, for his courage and strength of character.

The press and the authorities never knew him because his faith did not blend with showy religion. It was found in a dimension that cannot be described in simple terms. Faith for him was a personal event in the interior of individuals and could not be fully extended in public, neither by evangelistic propaganda nor by power or politics. This last concept constitutes the antithesis of the habitual and pernicious confusion between religion and politics that is referred to as "the confessional state", "legislation in accord with the ethics of the church" or "theology of liberation."

AN UNUSUAL INDIVIDUAL

He was born in Buenos Aires [Argentina], the son of Spaniard. There, a brilliant professional career would be cut off in order to fully give himself to the preaching of his faith. **Jack Jackson and Herbert Vitzthum**, North American preachers of Irish origin had had a great influence on him. From them he would learn of the United States of the "New Deal" era and he would admire their liberal values. He would have arrived in Spain in the 1950's at the height of "national catholicism", at a time of complete prohibition of religious liberty. He faced especially difficult situations, similar at times to those encountered by the political resistance to the regime. Juicy dialogues are told of police interrogators, disconcerted and angered by the effect that this unusual individual had on them.

His faith was that of a religious confession without name, accepting "Christianity" as its sole identifying term. A belief without temples and without hierarchy, whose meetings take place in the homes of the faithful. Their manner of life is strict and separate from worldly life, to the extent that it appears old-fashioned. Those who take on the duties of preaching leave behind all possessions, including their home and live by what is loaned to them or shared with them by the faithful, or by working at any kind of job when necessary. They accept no other written references except the Biblical texts.

Nowhere do they record their history—they themselves are unaware of it beyond what they remember of their own personal experience. They deny any other origin but Jesus. And, as a result, do not claim to stem from either Catholicism or Protestantism. In any case, they feel no need for historical verification. On being asked by a stranger about this, they smile and say that what counts is to consider the "fellowship of the faithful" over the centuries and from one end of the earth to the other. They make no practice of any kind of theological speculation nor do they generate any written publications. To them, faith is something simple and sufficient, for which one may or may not be willing. They have never tried to convince anyone by arguments. They have no proselytizing campaigns, they simply try to reflect daily the intimate living of their faith, without great discourse.

Certainly, their resemblance to what is called "primitive Christianity" is astonishing. Surely, this is the first that has ever been published in Spain about this atypical religious confession. I hope that what has been written does not constitute an excessive breach of their traditional discretion. To me and to my brother, whose idea it was to write this article, it has seemed a good way to render a very modest homage to don Basilio, an exceptional individual, unknown to journalists and authorities, whose impact is indelible upon all of us who knew him.

By Jordi Font

TTT Editor's Note: In the absence of a written account, the above information has been compiled by the TTT Editor from various sources. Corrections or additions are most welcome; as well as other historical accounts for other countries.

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