NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

690

Interview with

FRANCIS X. FERNANDEZ DE GARYALDE

April 28, 1985

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas

Interviewer: Jeri Echeverria

Terms of Use: open

Approved: Francis X Fernandez
(Signature)

Date: April 28, 85

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Oral History Collection

Father Francis Fernandez

Interviewer: Jeri Echeverria Date of Interview: April 28, 1985

Place of Interview: Ft. Worth, Texas

Ms. Echeverria: This is Jeri Echeverria interviewing Father Francis Fernandez for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection, and I'm interviewing Father Fernandez about his recollections on becoming a priest and his recollections of religious superstitions in the village of Alsasua, Navarra.

Father Francis, if you would, tell us a little bit about your background in Alsasua.

Father Fernandez: I was born in 1933. Remember that 1933 was a very eventful year in Alsasua. It was when everything was beginning to form before the Civil War. Alsasua was a little town--3,000 people at the time--nestling in the Pyrenees on the border between Navarra, Guipuzcoa, and Alava. We called it "Irumuga," which means the three boundaries.

My family was an ordinary family. We were eight children. I was the youngest. Father worked as an engineer on the railroad, and Mother remained with the eight of us at home.

Ms. Echeverria: Did you live in your village?

Father Fernandez: Oh, yes. Up to the time when I was sixteen, when I went to the seminary, I lived in the village. The village, as such,

clustered around the church. The square or the plaza was in front of the church. We children received our schooling there. I would say that my eldest sisters, who were seventeen or eighteen when I was born, were my second mothers or surrogate mothers. They took over the daily contact at home. Mother was more, what you'd call, the decision-maker in the house. Dad was, of course, the aita--the authority. You know, you'd just wait here or if he hears this, and everybody would straighten up. Whenever my brothers got in their teens and would came home late, they went to bed without any supper. At dinnertime and lunchtime were the times when everybody had to be there on time, and if you are late, sorry.

Echeverria: By sorry, you mean that you didn't eat if you were late?

Fernandez: Yes, that's right. You didn't eat. Those times were kind of sacred, and I don't think this was unique to our family. It was just that way in every family. At the same time--and this I observed as comparing to your culture--the extended family hardly existed. It was more the nuclear family, I mean, we at home. Cousins and uncles and aunts and neighbors and so forth were welcome, but when dinner or lunchtime came, they went home because they were expected to be home for their lunch. At home Dad was the authority, and I am reminded of this when I'm invited out with some of the parishoners. He would always sit at the head of the table.

Echeverria: Your father.

Fernandez: Oh, yes. Even if the bishop came to the house, whoever came to the house, that was his place. He was telling everybody, "Hey, you are welcome, but I'm the boss here." So when I go visiting and people invite me to sit at the head of the table, I tell them, "No, thank you." I just can't because somehow I feel that that place doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the father of the house.

Echeverria: Is that still done in the Basque country today?

Fernandez: Yes. When I go home, I see my brothers-in-law and my brothers sitting down always down at the head of the table. In a word, they are projecting, "Hey, I'm number one. I'm the authority."

My first recollection ever in my life was when one of my brothers died in the Civil War. It was 1936. I was, like I said, almost three, and I remember the tears and the crying and the townspeople and the mayor and so forth. My brother had died in the war, and they brought him home to be buried. I was three-and-a-half. Pretty often I try to recollect why this is the first memory of anything in my life. Possibly it's because it was so traumatic--seeing my parents crying, you know.

Echeverria: So you were the eighth of eight children, and your brother must have been one of the eldest.

Fernandez: I think he was the second or the third. Actually, he was my adopted godfather. Again, just as you are still looking

around for godparents, your older brothers and sisters would be your godparents. That was to keep everything at home (chuckle). It was the tradition and so forth.

Echeverria: This brings up a question I was wondering about. Do you remember, by the family, any religious practices that you practiced together?

Fernandez: Yes, of course. There my mother was the, you know, motivator, the generator, the person who would remind everybody of everything. In my case it was my mother and my older sisters. For us religion and the practice of our faith is a very private thing. When I used to go home, and I invited my brothers and sisters or whatever to read a little from the Bible and say a little prayer, my brothers feel like I'm intruding.

Echeverria: When you said, "For us religion is a very private thing," do you mean for us Basques or for your particular family?

Fernandez: I would say for everybody--for all Basques. First of all, I would like to dwell on this now. I think it is the time. We were not as open. The joy wasn't expressed as much as, I would say, in other cultures. I noticed this when I went to the seminary. There were over 200 young men in the seminary. Of course, many of them came from other areas, what we call the <u>ribera</u>, which are down deeper into Spain, right? It's sunnier and not so mountainous and so forth. These people were much more natural, much more open, much more relaxed.

I'm contemplating this when I go home now. For instance, the Basque personality is much closed in. We don't communicate as openly as other people. I've been to the Philippines, and people seem to open up more. Other Orientals are much more private.

Echeverria: You say your mother took a lead in your religious practices in your family. What about your father? What was his role in this area?

Fernandez: Dad would go to church on Sundays, and Dad wouldn't let anybody use foul language or lie. In this area, his role was not much (chuckle).

Echeverria: I see.

Fernandez: It was more his example. It was more his businesslike attitude toward all that. When passing in front of the church, he'll remove the boina--the beret. In dealing with the town priest, he was the authority, and he owed him respect. Dad was a city councilman for I don't know how many years. He was never a mayor, but, anyway, at the same time he thought of himself, I think, a little as, "Hey, I'm somebody," and he projected this thing at home. Dad was the driving force behind everything. My brothers continued to study in the Christian Brothers school because Dad was behind it. My brothers went every day by train, waking up every morning at 3:30 or 4:00 in going to the Salesian School. It was because Dad was behind it. It was, like I said, just his presence

and his personality more than his words.

Echeverria: I see. Did most of you--you and your brothers and sisters--go to religious schools?

Fernandez: All of us.

Echeverria: All of you did.

Fernandez: Yes, all of us went. My sisters went to convent school in town. As a matter of fact, one of my sister's became a sister, and she's a sister today. When I began schooling, even with snow and winter weather and everything, you had to go. You had to go. You woke up in the morning, and you walked (chuckle).

Echeverria: There was some absolutes in your family.

Fernandez: Yes. In the family and in society, there were some absolute expectations that everybody did and everybody performed, so if you got a cold, you still went. That drove you because everybody else went, too.

Echeverria: I see. Tell me a little about your decision to enter the priesthood. Actually, how did you decide to do that?

Fernandez: How did I decide? Even today, I'd have to guess as to how I decided. I would say that more than anything else, I had no plans. I had never thought of it. I had never...I went to the Christian Brothers for schooling and occasionally they would talk to us about vocations and so forth, but I always thought this was for somebody else. This was not for me. I never confronted myself. I never sat down to think,

"Am I called for it or not?"

I think, in a sense, that it occurred on a Mission Sunday. Mission Sunday is the one Sunday during the year when you pray for the missions, and you help the missions and all that. A month before Mission Sunday, we were given little sheets of paper wherein you would write every good thing that you did. You'd be helping out poor people, and you'd deprive yourself of dessert, and you'd be doing your school homework, and you'd be extra silent and so forth.

Echeverria: What was your age at this time?

Fernandez: All throughout this time. Maybe from seven up to fourteen, fifteen.

Echeverria: I see.

Fernandez: I mean, this was an ongoing thing. You'd pass in front of the church, and you'd rush in there just to say that you had made a visit to the church. You'd fall on your knees, maybe make a little prayer--pray for the missions--and rush out. Maybe you'd come back again and pray for the missions and go out, and you'd go in and out maybe twenty times (chuckle).

In a way, this, I think, very unconsciously went on setting the tone and planting the seed. More immediately, the month of October all over the Basque area is a beautiful month. It is the fall; it is harvest time. Very early in the morning in our little town, there was a little devotion to Mary. This was at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. And by the time then,

it is cold. It wasn't snowing yet, but by November you have snow in the mountains. There is a saying, "Todos los santos nieve en los altos."

Echeverria: Which translated means?

Fernandez: "By all saints--November the second--snow in the heights." Well, one morning while we were playing...between early mass and school there was always a break, and we played on the street, you know, playing hide-and-seek and so forth. And I don't know...I just don't know how...I honestly don't know even after all these years. I seemed to have rushed home and went to the kitchen and told them, "I'm going to go to the seminary." My sister said, "What do you say?" And I said, "I'm going to the seminary." And I rushed out and continued playing. I never said a word to anybody else--none of my other brothers and sisters, none of my friends. Sunday morning comes, and my parents say, "Your sister says ...." And I say, "Oh, yes. Well, what do you think?" They said, "If you want to." And we went to visit the nearby seminary, which happened to be the Cappuchin Seminary.

Echeverria: You went with your mother and father.

Fernandez: Yes. It was very late because classes began in early September. It was already October. The seminary was closed, and classes had begun. Nevertheless, they said, "So you want to come here?" I said, "Yes." "Well, come in." There were exams; there were interviews. Then everything was done with.

Echeverria: So your parents actually didn't discuss it with you. They asked you if you wanted to. You said, "Yes." And they took you to the seminary.

Fernandez: And that was that.

Echeverria: That was that.

Fernandez: There was only one of my brothers who had the nerve to call me once and say, "I hear you want to go to the seminary." I said, "Yes." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, why?" "I don't know." He said, "Don't be an idot! Why?" And I just said, "I don't know." I didn't have any valid reason to go to the seminary beyond this, that young seminarians used to walk around and visit the towns and present little stage shows--musical and otherwise--connected with issues, connected with family. It was a way to evangelize, you know. A bunch of these seminarians would pass through our town, and they presented a missionary show, which is a musical. I had always enjoyed music. I'd seen those young boys--twelve or thirteen--sing so beautifully. I was thinking, "Oh, I would like to sing like them!" So in the back of my head, I just thought, "I'm going to grow up to sing like them."

Echeverria: So it was sort of a combination of these mission months from years seven to fourteen, plus this experience of seeing the young seminarians coming around. And you were influenced by it.

Fernandez: Sure. It was the family atmosphere of seriousness, of an attitude of responsibility, of a drive to do something and be something. It was just a combination of those things.

Echeverria: And neither your mother or your father said, "Are you sure you want to do this, son?"

Fernandez: No. They asked, "You want to go?" I said, "Yes." That's all.

Echeverria: What do you think they were thinking?

Fernandez: What were they thinking? I'm sure they were pleased. At the same time, I remember the tears that they shed when they kissed me good-bye. How they cried. I remember Mother calling me--so much so that Dad took her aside to tell her, "Listen, you are disturbing him too much. Don't call so often."

Echeverria: So you were missed.

Fernandez: I'm sure of that, yes. They were looking for opportunities to come around during visiting hours and even days that were not for visitors and so forth. I'm sure I was missed since I was the youngest.

Echeverria: Do Basque parents, like your parents, consider it a special honor for their children to take religious orders?

Fernandez: (Sigh) Well, yes. But they knew that most likely that I'll leave the country because other young men from the town who had joined had left. They knew what was going to happen to me, so that wasn't a very pleasant thing to think of.

But being deeply religious, I'm sure that they were projecting in me what perhaps they had wanted to do themselves--to work and to preach and so on and so forth. It kind of compensated them for me to do the good they had wanted to do.

Echeverria: What about attitudes, either from your parents or yourself, toward priests before you became a priest or before you went into the seminary? Do you have any attitudes that you remember?

Fernandez: More of respect than anything else, I would say.

Echeverria: So the priest is a respected leader.

Fernandez: Yes. I remember my dad talking about the pastor in our town. In the winter--snow or whatever--that man would be in the confessional by 6:00 every morning. You come to admire that. When somebody would talk about the pastor and say, "Oh, he's nobody special, and he's whatever," my dad would exclaim, "But look at him!" My dad, I remember, defended him for what he did.

Echeverria: What would he defend him for? What was it that he particularly admired in him?

Fernandez: His discipline, his attitude as a go-getter toward the sick and making sure nobody died without the sacraments, you know.

Echeverria: How about yourself? Did you have any particular attitude toward the priest different from your parents as a child?

Fernandez: I don't think I really related to any priest. I related much more to the brothers who taught me. Of course, we

saw them more as teachers than brothers. At that time, you know, when you'd have to be disciplined, you'd have to write a job or whatever 200 times and so forth. You'd come to school with your homework well-done, but you'd have to stay behind and take this punishment for your own self-discipline more than anything else. I don't think I ever looked up to them as religious people, as people committed to a mission in the church. They were just teachers.

Echeverria: Isn't that interesting? So there was a distinction between a brother and a priest for you.

Fernandez: Yes. Very much.

Echeverria: What would you say, especially in your youth, was the influence of the priest in his village? Was he an influential leader?

Fernandez: Yes. He was more than the pastor. In a way I'm reflecting this on me at this time, when dealing with the youth and children. There was a young assistant--very out-going, very approachable. On Sunday afternoons he would take us walking up the mountains, play ball, jai alai. In other words, he was more of a friend to whom you could talk and share and have a laugh and so forth. The pastor was more the guy who was always running around busy--visiting the sick, weddings, confessionals, and so forth. These young priests--and there were several there--somehow opened up the human side for the priesthood to me. Now, I guess, they're reflecting on my attitude here, right? I realize that since I'm the youngest...

Echeverria: At this parish here.

Fernandez: (Chuckle) At this parish. I would say that it was the human side of the younger priests.

Echeverria: That had an influence on you personally.

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: How about the pastor? Did he have a role in influencing community decisions?

Fernandez: Not much. Not much. You know, there had been a time in Spain and in our country when the pastor was the authority, more than the mayor and so forth. After the Civil War, no. I think the priests learned their lesson. I suppose that they influenced...I'm not acquainted with any of their influence in city affairs or whatever.

Echeverria: When you say they learned their lessons in the war, could you explain that a little bit?

Fernandez: I mean by that that before the war, priests were the authority in the town. If there was going to be music in the city square, in a way he'd have to say what kind of music and at what time. If there was a band...and, of course, dancing at the time was open. On Sunday afternoon everybody went to the square, and you danced. It was a beautiful thing. The older people would be walking around, you know, playing with the children, drinking a glass of wine and so forth. The younger ones would be dancing. So it was very open. It was very social. It was very good. When the

Angelus bell rang at 8:00 in the evening, everybody went home. The music ended. Everybody prayed, and you went home.

Echeverria: The priest was sort of the master of ceremonies.

Fernandez: Yes. The bell rang at 8:00, and that was the end of the day. Things began to change after the Civil War. First of all, it was because of external influences. The town wasn't as close as it used to be. There was much more communication. People from other towns would be coming over. People from our town would be going to other towns. You know, there were the movies. I know the movies had a very specific effect. They were showing Gone With the Wind in a nearby town which belonged to a different diocese. Well, Gone With the Wind was forbidden in our diocese, but it was not in the neighboring diocese. Trainloads of people from our diocese would go to the neighboring diocese to see Gone With the Wind. When they came back, the priest would be in an uproar, and he'd go to the pulpit and excommunicate everybody and so forth. Well, you began to laugh at him, and then he began losing ground and realizing these are different times.

Echeverria: This is the sort of thing that broke down the authority of the priests.

Fernandez: Sure. It was because of his intervention in affairs that were not exclusively church affairs. The younger generations and so forth would say, "No, Father, no." So that was the beginning of the breaking up with the old tradition.

Echeverria: That's very clear. One other question. You mentioned earlier about your parents noticing that other young people went off to seminaries and then they went off to missionary fields. The question I have is, how common was it for Basque children to enter religious orders?

Fernandez: Very. Very. Basques were very religious. It was so ingrained that it was tantamount to be Catholic, to be Basque. And anybody that really felt his culture, his life, his tradition ...all these elements are intertwined with your faith. Somehow you had to live them close to the church. Again, this is interesting. The promotors and motivators of Basque culture were the priests. They played a lot of games. They used to play with us. They used to play jai alai. They would bring regular dances, language, the old histories, the traditions. They would be the ones that would be passing on the elements of tradition. Basques were very religious, so consequently thousands and thousands of children and teenagers went to the seminaries, and you find them anywhere in the world. Anywhere in the world. As you know, St. Ignatius Loyola was a Basque; Francis Xavier was a Basque. We have prominent seminaries. The Franciscans in Aranzazu have a beautiful seminary. From there they have a couple of radio stations where they broadcast everything in Basque. In Aranzazu you have a teacher training institute where all the teachers go over there. And everything is now in Basque--to grow in their

Basque attitudes. I mean, there are all these things. So there have been advances in communications. There are grammars, dictionaries.

Echeverria: So, for instance, in your family there are eight children, and two of you took religious orders. Would you say that was common?

Fernandez: Oh, yes, yes. It's relatively common.

Echeverria: So among the friends that you had in growing up, one or two of the children would probably take religious orders.

Fernandez: In most families there was somebody who chose the religious life. In my own family, I have a cousin who's a Jesuit, and he's in Venezuala; I have another cousin who is a Salesian, and he's in Ecuador; I have another cousin who's a Cappuchin like me, and he's in Chile. These three are priests and are first cousins. And sisters...I think there are six or seven besides my sister. So it was very common. You have huge seminaries in Vitoria, San Sebastian, and Bilboa where you have 100 or 120 priests ordained every year, and these young men were sent abroad by the bundles--maybe a hundred each year or two hundred each year. They were taking care of whole dioceses here in Latin America--anywhere--in Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador. By the hundreds they left the country. It was a very missionary situation.

Echeverria: You've spoken about your own family, but do you think that parents encouraged children to consider this, that that might

be part of this; or do you think it was more what you spoke of earlier, the relationship between Catholicism and being Basque, that had so many people take religious orders?

Fernandez: As I mentioned, in my case it was completely personal. It was an atmosphere. It was a feeling for it. Once a year a missionary will walk by a little town, go to the school, introduce themselves, and say something of their lives. And young boys and young ladies would sign up and go. Just like that, you know. That's it. This happened in every school and college. It was a combination of the family--very stable, very religious--but at the same time, it is motivation from these people who are priests, who have been missionaries, who came around and invited and asked us and so on.

Echeverria: I see. Not necessarily a pressure from parents.

Fernandez: No. Among the seminarians that I studied with when I went to the seminary, I don't think a single one of them was pressured. It's very interesting, the fact that you mention this. When I went to the seminary, among the forty or so who were together in the same class, over thirty of us were the youngest in the family.

Echeverria: Is that right?

Fernandez: Yes. And pretty often I have noticed that this is an interesting phenomenon. The youngest in the families usually went to the seminary, and I'd been wondering why.

Echeverria: I was going to ask you, why you thought it was like this.

Fernandez: I have no idea.

Echeverria: Well, with the old laws in the Basque villages about inheriting the farm, clearly the young aren't going to inherit.

Fernandez: Well, not in our case. In our case property was supposed to be equally divided.

Echeverria: Oh, is that right?

Fernandez: Oh, yes, among all the brothers and sisters it was equally divided. So it wasn't the usual way in our case. Not in mine, though, because when I became a Cappuchin, I voluntarily signed...we have to...

Echeverria: Is this the vows of poverty?

Fernandez: Yes, that's right. Through the vow of poverty I cannot inherit, and these papers were signed when I became a Cappuchin. All my brothers and sisters know this, of course, and I did this freely.

Echeverria: That's interesting about the youngest members of the family.

Fernandez: It would be interesting to look into.

Echeverria: Yes, it would.

Fernandez: Perhaps this would be happening in other places with other people--the Irish, whatever.

Echeverria: I don't know. It would be interesting to see some statistics on that. Quite a bit has been written about some of the early churches in the Basque villages and actually how they are. Can you remember well enough to describe the church you

attended as a boy--the actual way the church was set up, how people sat when they went to mass?

Fernandez: (Chuckle) I recall that when I was a boy, men would sit on one side and women on the other side of the church. Children were brought out to the front--what they called the communion ________________ or there about--facing the people, facing the audience.

Echeverria: Oh, they faced out.

Fernandez: Yes. You'll see the glaring and staring of the grown-ups if you opened your mouth. There was powerful singing. Beyond that, what could I say?

Echeverria: I presume the mass was conducted in Latin.

Fernandez: Yes, sure. Well, the mass was in Latin, but what we called the devotions, the prayers, were in Basque and then Spanish later on. Some of the processions that we had...all over the area there are little shrines built up in the mountains, and the whole town would go up in procession. They had kind of a carnival at the same time--carrying the statue and having music as it were, and then up at the shrine they'd have mass and spend a few hours eating and drinking and dancing and come home.

Echeverria: Was this considered to be a religious festival?

Fernandez: Both, religious and lay. It was a festival.

Echeverria: Social and religious.

Fernandez: Right, social and religious. Sure. They'd bring food up

there and spend the day. City hall (the mayor) will usually offer free wine and cigars to everybody. You still drank from little silver cups. They'd go from one to the next as a sign of conviviality and unity and...

Echeverria: Sharing.

Fernandez: ...sharing--that's right--with the town. There are beautiful feasts in my hometown. I still remember La Marvahina, which I used to sing in Basque: "La Marvahina, eskuratu etako zuria eskuatia nebuskia desde eskualia uria." [singing]

Echeverria: Can you tell us just basically what you have just sung?

Fernandez: It was a nearbymountain, and whenever it was too dry, you went over there to pray to the Virgin,to intercede for rain. So it was to the Virgin who has in her hands the lightning and the thunder and so forth. You'd ask for rain. We had the famous shrine of St. Peter, which was the border between two towns--ours and another. You went up there, and you had the traditional dances on June 29. If I could do anything, I always loved to be there on June 29. Everybody has to go home on June 29, wherever you are in the world, and it is beautiful because you meet priests and sisters and outsiders.

Echeverria: And it's your village's day.

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: Each village has one such day.

Fernandez: Several.

Echeverria: Several days.

Fernandez: Several day, yes.

Echeverria: What about the actual physical construction of the church itself? I've read, for instance, that some of the oldest churches have the family burial plots in the floors of the churches. Does your church have that sort of thing?

Fernandez: No, ours doesn't. But some of the other churches that I know of, they have. You know the little towns are so small, and therefore you have the cemetery close by. There is always a little chapel, which used to be the church of the town, built around that, and so it was the church where you worshipped and where you were buried. And you have cases, for instances, where you have a communal cemetery. By communal cemetery, I mean the cemetary's built on the wall of the church. People were being buried as they died. After so many years the tomb is empty, and the next one is buried there. How many there were in that family, whoever died next is buried there next to the wall.

Echeverria: I see.

Fernandez: And the bones are exhumed and are kept in a common graveyard.

Echeverria: I've never heard that. That's a very practical approach, isn't it?

Fernandez: Very practical approach.

Echeverria: Does the family come and pay respects?

Fernandez: Well, yes. On November 2 everybody goes there.

Echeverria: All Souls' Day.

Fernandez: All Souls' Day. You see, you have the niches built...

Echeverria: In rows.

Fernandez: Yes, in rows. This year this is your niche, but next year this is somebody else's niche.

Echeverria: Yes, I understand.

Fernandez: So this year you may have some bodies there, and then you could have no body buried there. Nevertheless, everybody passes by, remembering the people who had died and so forth.

Echeverria: I see. So it would be more of a community remembrance.

Fernandez: Much more.

Echeverria: There's not as much focus as it is here in the States on the particular grave site.

Fernandez: No. Now in larger places, of course, you have the family plot wherein the extended family members are buried. But in little places you still have this system that I have described.

Echeverria: I see. That's interesting. What about sacramental observances? Are there any unique religious practices among Basque Catholics? I'm thinking of things like baptisms and funerals and things like we have here. Are they celebrated or remembered in any different way?

Fernanez: First of all, if I talk of the past, yes, they are somewhat unique. If I talk of the present, things are more or less the same as here.

Echeverria: How about the ones you remember from the past?

Fernandez: Okay, those of the past. You had the first communion and the second first communion. The first communion was like it is here, when a young boy or young girl was seven or eight. However, he did not receive the second communion until he was thirteen or fourteen. During those years you went weekly to catechism held by the priests or the sisters or somebody, and you were growing in your own faith. Then when you were thirteen or fourteen, you received your second communion, and from then on you received it regularly.

Echeverria: I see. Was second communion there, then, something like what we call confirmation?

Fernandez: I was just thinking that it was like a bar mitzvah, the Jewish thing. What we are trying to have now in the line of confirmation is that when you are thirteen or fourteen, it is the time of initiation or commitment or something like that. This is the way it was done.

Echeverria: Is the practice or the ceremony like ours here?

Fernandez: Basically now it is like ours, yes. I got to know the way it was described, right, the first and the second. But now it is just like here.

Echeverria: So now they have a first communion and not a second communion.

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: Right. I see. What about, for instance, funerals in your early remembrance?

Fernandez: Well, funerals in the concept of little places are city affairs or town affairs because everybody knows everybody. Again, you could know who are your friends and who are your enemies from those who attend your family funerals. After the Civil War--and this is my recollection, right--the town was often divided as some of the people had fought for Franco's side or for the Republicans. As a consequence, if somebody from the Republican side died, Republicans would go to the funeral; if somebody from Franco's side died, then all the people from that side would go to the funeral. This is in our town. I don't think this was the same in other towns. In other places, when somebody dies, usually everybody goes. Often everybody is related to everybody else and so forth.

Echeverria: I've actually noticed that to be somewhat true in the Basque communities in the United States, that when a Basque dies people come from hundreds of miles around because there seems to be an inner obligation to attend.

Fernandez: Yes. I think it is still so. I remember when I buried my mother. I was there for the burial. If our town had 4,000 people, I believe 3,000 were there. Which, of course, is monstrous.

Echeverria: There's no place to put 3,000 people.

Fernandez: Nowhere. Beyond that, I don't think there is anything different.

Echeverria: You wouldn't say, really, at least in your recollections, that there's anything particularly unique about Basque Catholic practices.

Fernandez: No, not from what I have seen elsewhere, beyond the deep religiosity, beyond the formality in the approach to religious practices. You don't smile in church and so forth, right?

Echeverria: This is similar to what you said earlier about your father--a rather cold approach to it?

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: Or private perhaps is better. I had read this...this, of course, is looking back in history and then noting the fact that catholicism came relatively late to the Basque country compared to the rest of Europe. Some authors have suggested that there are quite a number of superstitious aspects of Basque culture that have kind of washed over into the Catholic practice. For instance, they mentioned the ogia salutore, the savior bread, as being a bit of superstition as well as a religious practice. Is that accurate in your memory?

Fernandez: Yes. I wouldn't go far into this. There's much written in this respect. In our hometown we still have what we call the gentilia kaminoak, the ways of the gentiles. Faith and civilization came up through the valleys, which is natural. The mountain people are left there by themselves, isolated

and undisturbed, until they themselves came to the valleys and began raiding people. And Basques are famous for this.

Echeverria: The raiders.

Fernandez: Yes, that's right. Well, then the valley people had to take arms and go off and start fighting and so forth, which means to say that people who lived in the valleys were converted to Christianism, Catholicism and so forth, much earlier than the people who lived in the mountains. Well, geographically, most Basques live in mountains or live in valleys sheltered up in mountains, so faith came, surely, very late. As you know, San Cernan, who is the patron saint of Pamplona, was French and was martyred, was killed, by the Basques. And he's today's patron saint. That happens.

Echeverria: (Chuckle) Basques are flexible people.

Fernandez: Very. Some of these Basque traditions accepted into the church, into the faith, are the nights of _amagoya_, the full moon. If you read Navarre Villos Lados's _Los Vascos en El Siglo Trece_...I'm not sure of the exact title.

Echeverria: _The Basques in the Thirteenth Century_.

Fernandez: Yes, something like that. He describes all these traditions, like the full moon nights when offering gifts to our gods up in the mountains. _Amagoya_ was traditionally...Basques have been a very matriarchal society, and that's because of the mother of God.

Echeverria: The mother, the moon.

Fernandez: The mother, the moon. Actually, I understand the familiy's movement has picked up on this.

Echeverria: In the Basque country?

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: I wondered, too. I've read about the serorak, the Basque women who claimed to have had sort of, I guess, a special role in the church.

Fernandez: Sure did.

Echeverria: Do you have any experience in this?

Fernandez: No, I haven't read on that. I know that some of the abbesses, the superiors of the abbeys, used to have the authority of a bishop. In these huge abbeys, when they send missionary sisters here, there, and so forth, actually they have as much power as a bishop. But I'm not personally acquainted with any concrete instances.

Echeverria: So you didn't have the experience of any female leaders in the church community that was in any way unusual.

Fernandez: No. As in every community, women are much more religious than men, and therefore they always are at the church doing things and so forth. They lead prayers and whatnot, but nothing unusual.

Echeverria: Nothing like the serorak model.

Fernandez: No, I'm not acquainted with that.

Echeverria: How about any other...I'm thinking not what we've read about the past, like, in the thirteenth and fourteenth century,

but any other...the use of the word, <u>sorgina</u>, the witch concept as opposed to the <u>astiya</u>. The <u>astiya</u> is supposedly the good witch, and the <u>sorgina</u> is the bad witch, which kind of indicates a sort of supersition among Basque people. Have you run into this?

Fernandez: Yes. As a matter of fact, you have the <u>sorgin danza</u>, which is the dance of the witch and songs and so forth. Yes, there are, again, traditions with witches. But I think you have them among the Irish; we have here the Salem witches and so forth. People talk of that, and the nights of <u>amagoya</u>, when you see the <u>sorgina</u> flying on her broom here and there and so forth. But I don't think I could relate to any concrete history or case. Just storytelling.

Echeverria: So for you it's part of the culture and part of the folklore...

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: ...but not actually transcending that and jumping into the realm of belief.

Fernandez: No. We used to talk of this. We used to go out on the full moon night and look in the heavens for her. But beyond that, no. It transcends the storytelling.

Echeverria: Interesting. There's one other thing I wanted to ask you. We're getting towards the end of my list of questions. I have been told that among Catholics in the world that male attendence is relatively high in the Basques. You mentioned, for instance, that your father always attended mass, perhaps

more as a leadership thing. Is that accurate from your remembrances?

Fernandez: I would rather say it was accurate rather than it is accurate.

Echeverria: Oh, I see.

Fernandez: There has been a deep, traumatic transition in the last twenty to twenty-five years as far as religious practices in general and particularly men's religious practices. Elderly people still flock to churches, and they love their church deeply. We have the most traditional masses in San Sebastian, for instance, and practically everyplace at noon, 12:30 or 1:00. Elderly people get up with leisure at 9:00 or 9:30, take up breakfast, go for a walk, and then come to church, have mass, and go home for a bite and a siesta and so forth. Among the younger generation, no.

Echeverria: Not so.

Fernandez: I could relate very personally to this experience. When my nephews and nieces come home, there is a holy war.

Echeverria: In your family?

Fernandez: Oh, yes. My nephews and nieces are in their late teens, early twenties, and so forth, and they hardly step into the church. They hardly go to church at all. My brothers and people their age, they do. And so on Sunday at lunchtime, the first question is, "Have you been to church today?" And they know the answer. Like an old record, "This is none of your business." And there's that. And, "Well, if you haven't

been to church, you don't eat." And so there are lies about going to church, and they are learning right away to say, "I have been to church." Playing games, right? The grandparents, the elderly people, are constantly talking to the teenagers about how bad the world is. And I feel bad for them because if there have been changes anywhere, changes there have been much deeper. From a society that was very cloistered and very sheltered up in the mountains, their society is now completely open. External influences have been due to industry, jobs. We have thousands upon thousands of non-Basques going there, and therefore they brought with them a new way of living, everything from language to everything. So it isn't what it used to be. For better or for worse. I'm not crying out my heart. But it is not. So many of these things that you say about the Basques were true but are not necessarily so today.

Echeverria: So they've evolved quite a bit in the course of your lifetime.

Fernandez: Yes, tremendously. Before, nobody would dare live together without marriage and so forth. These days they do.

Echeverria: Divorce would also be something unheard of.

Fernandez: It is beginning--divorce, abortion. I know people who went to England when abortion was outlawed in Spain. From Bilboa to Southhampton, you have the ferryboat daily, back and forth. So it is a matter of going to England, having an abortion, and coming home. You know, no big deal and so forth. So, really, it's a new life. So, like I say, I hope, Jeri, you will keep

this in mind. Talking about the Basques, in a way, is something that is past. Are there any unique differences between the Basques today and people who live elsewhere in Spain, for instance? Beyond the culture and the language, I don't think so. Every region has its own characteristics, you know, conditioned by geography and so forth. That continues.

Echeverria: Well, Father Francis, thank you very much.

Fernandez: You're welcome.

Echeverria: That completes my questions. I've really enjoyed talking with you.

Fernandez: It's been a pleasure.

Echeverria: Thank you.

Oral History Collection

Father Francis Fernandez

Interviewer: Jeri Echeverria Date of Interview: May 6, 1985

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas

Ms. Echeverria: Father Francis, tell me about your experiences at the seminary--when you went into the seminary.

Father Fernandez: How I felt when I went to the seminary?

Ms. Echeverria: Yes.

Father Fernandez: First of all, I should say that I was very naive. I was fifteen, and I took a plunge. You learn to handle those guys your age. You just get submerged. Somehow you don't feel lonely, that you don't belong. You have known some of the young men your age before they entered. They take you in, and you go. Seminary life is so busy that--this is one of the handicaps--it does not give you time to think and reflect enough. You seem to go and go and go like a robot--mechanical. It is only years later, when you have time with nothing to do, that then you begin to think. At the time I went there, life was very regimented. We never went home summer or winter--nothing. We lived in the seminary twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. I remember when my parents came to invite me to go home before moving to another seminary for the study of philosophy, and they didn't

let me go home even by the time I was seventeen.

I remember when one of my brothers got married, and they came--he and his girlfriend--to invite me to the wedding at the church. And they did not want me to go, but they let me go. And the reason why they wanted me to stay at the monastery was because I was only seventeen, and I might go away permanently. Since no one could go, I took it for granted that neither I would be going. That was when I was between the ages of fifteen or eighteen.

By the time I was nineteen, I had moved to another seminary for the study of philosophy at Zaragosa. That's the name of the place, and it's a large city of 800,000 or maybe more. Somehow I began to open up to another kind of life outside. Young men my age were courting girls, and ex-seminarians whom we had known were going around with freedom. Then you were inside with no freedom at all--silence, study, regimentation, and discipline. With that kind of future, you begin to think, "Now, is this what I want?" This was a time of crisis for most of us, I should say --eighteen, nineteen--going into what we called the novitiate. I was twenty when I went. During those three years, we lost more than half of our classmates in the seminary. Basically, it was due to growth, crises, not just the academics. The students who could not go to Zaragosa were left behind earlier in the minor seminary. By this time, everybody who was there

was qualified enough to continue. Not everybody was talented, of course.

I remember how solemn was the seminary, you know. When I went through the novitiates, there was a whole year of silence. We were getting up every night at 1:30 in the morning. We said nothing. We'd fast. We'd go thirty days without speaking a word and on and on and on. I managed somehow, by the grace of God. Otherwise, it was inconceivable that a young man of twenty would be able to go through such a kind of life.

Echeverria: Can you describe an average day in your minor seminary, the first one you were at?

Fernandez: On an average day, it was something like this. We'd get up very early, maybe 6:30 in that morning. We'd wash up and so forth and go to the chapel. In the chapel we had a little meditation and mass up to 7:30. We'd go back to the dorm and do your bedding and brush your teeth and so forth. At 8:00 was breakfast. By 8:30 we were in class. There were hours of study usually in the morning, a half an hour break, and then classes again to 12:00. There'd be a short visit to the chapel at 12:00 and then lunch and then a break or recreation up to 2:00. You'd go back to class at 2:00 to 4:30, and then we had a one-hour break from 4:30 to 5:30. Then there'd be personal study for the next two hours up to 7:30, and then it was back to the chapel again for meditation

and so forth. We ate dinner and then had a half an hour break. Then it was back upstairs and then bed. So it was a full day, and by the time you went to bed in the evening, you were ready to hit the sack (chuckle). It was a long day.

And that was a long scholastic year. Our vacation was very short. On Thursday afternoons we were off, and we'd spend three or four hours playing soccer. That's why most of us were very good soccer players (chuckle). We'd also play handball, racquetball, and the boys would play jai alai and stuff like that.

Echeverria: What, if anything, has been said about politics in the seminary?

Fernandez: To talk about politics in the seminary was a "no-no." I'm talking of the early 1950s and late 1940s when I went. The wounds of war were still bleeding. There had been--I think I mentioned the last time--very traumatic experiences among the people of my community. Many priests had been exiled from Spain to Argentina, Chile, and Equador by the government. Those that remained there were selected individually so that nobody would talk to us of politics.

Echeverria: Was it a spoken rule that you would not discuss politics?

Fernandez: I think it was more a silent agreement. I spent three years in Fuenterribia. Fuenterribia is a little place which is located on the French border. There was a missionary from Guam and the Philippines who came back--he was elderly and

sickly--and one day as we were having a <u>hendaye</u> game, he asked for help to climb a few steps. I was one who helped him, and immediately he started talking about politics and Franco's government. When the director heard of it, the two of us were given zeros for obedience and conduct. We ate on our knees that day at lunch because, first, we had disobeyed, and, second, we had talked of politics, and, third, we had talked with a stranger. So the rule on non-intervention in politics was eminent and intransigent as a way to prevent any problems.

Echeverria: Not that you would necessarily know, but where do you think this rule came from? Why did this rule come about?

Fernandez: I suppose it came from the superiors, having suffered so much from dissension in communities wherein some of the members were for Franco and some were against Franco. There was division; there was misunderstanding; and there was very little charity. As a consequence they simply said, "Okay, hush! No talking of this! Everybody's the same!" And so everything had to be subdued.

In Fuenterribia we had the Fuerte San Marcial--St. Marcial Fort--which is on the very boundary, French boundary, where one of the biggest battles in the war was fought. I think there was seven of our priests who were killed and buried there by the Republicans before Franco's forces came. When their forces were withdrawn, they found that their bones had

been cracked and broken and so forth while they were still alive. War is war and all these things have to happen. Besides, I mention this to let you know how bitter were the feelings involved in the war.

Echeverria: I have read about the Spanish Civil War. The priests, especially the Basque priests, took a particularly strong role in it. They actually were in the fields and leading men and praying with men and having masses on the battle-fields and things.

Fernandez: Yes, that's very true, Jeri. We are talking of the context wherein the priest was the leader. That's not only in religious affairs but also the leader of the community. So if a little community was involved in politics and war and dissension, the priest was in the midst of it all. That is why on both sides there were crimes committed against priests, but you must understand that many of these priests were personally involved in issues, not necessarily in church affairs but in leadership in the community. Many of our priests crossed the border from Fuenterribia, Irun, Lecaroz, and so forth to France. They were there in Bayonne, Toulousse, and so forth for many, many years. When things settled down, most of them came back from shelters in southern France.

Echeverria: Were they welcomed back?

Fernandez: Oh, yes. Sure. It was the same as it was in Cuba and

Argentina and so forth. For those who wanted to go back, by the middle 1950s there was no objection to coming back.

Echeverria: I was going to ask you what...your sect was Cappuchin. As far as these people who fled over the border, the priests who fled over the border, they remained in the priesthood.

Fernandez: Yes. They went to Cappuchin monasteries in France.

Echeverria: I see.

Fernandez: They ministered in the work over there to the French and the Basques who had been exiled and so forth.

Echeverria: You mentioned earlier that the priests who instructed you in the minor seminary were carefully selected. How do you suppose they were selected?

Fernandez: Of course, selection involved a psychological test--simply from knowledge of who the person was, how he thought, and so forth. Usually, they were pious men, prudent, who would not lead the seminarians into any type of disagreement and so forth. It made no difference, for instance, whether he spoke Basque or he didn't, or he came from this area or from that area. I had a professor who came from Bezama, which is in the center of Guipuzcoa, and he was a beautiful man. Some of them came from Navarra; some of them came from Viscaya or Biscay. It was an individual basis rather than just simply Basque.

Echeverria: It was not decided regionally. It was decided on an individual basis.

Fernandez: Yes.

Echeverria: I wonder if you know whether there was any pressure from the state on your sect.

Fernandez: I don't have detailed information on that question, but I feel there was from the hierarchy at the beginning. More than anything else, because the wounds were so deep, as I mentioned, the superiors had to be very careful not to have the divisions and dissension that we had before--friars against friars--because of politics. We knew about the division of the world. We simply could not shut it off at the door of the monastery and say, "You cannot come in here!" They did--the press, the radio, your relatives, people you talked to and so forth. I'm talking about priests, not seminarians. So they lived in the midst of this dissension, and they carried this dissension into the monastery, and things would happen, right?

Echeverria: I understand. So within your first three years, there was no discussion. What about when you went to the secondary level--the novitiate?

Fernandez: I left Spain right after the novitiate.

Echeverria: That would be about what year?

Fernandez: In 1955. I think I began to talk a little about "how do you feel" and "what do you think" and so forth. I don't think there was any political ideology or any political atmosphere or any attempt to politicize the students this or

that way. There was an occasional sharing during recreation and so forth which would occur rather than any formal attempt to indoctrinate or whatever. There was a little more opening up informally.

Echeverria: When you went into the seminary, what were your attitudes toward the Spanish Civil War? I remember earlier you mentioned that your brother had been killed in the war.

Fernandez: My attitude? When I went to the seminary it was, of course, during Franco's time. The propaganda, the information, the means of communication--media control--was complete so that the non-Franco people had no means of spreading any information. The Republican side of the war was completely negated--completely ignored--so history was presented from Franco's side. The emblems, the flags, and everything had to be identical. Franco at this time was trying tremendously to unify Spain and to avoid any of the regionalisms that had existed before (very strong characteristics). The Basques in a way lost the war, and naturally all their rights and privileges and so forth were completely denied, and some individuals disappeared. Franco meant to unify everybody as Spanish and loyal to Madrid. So everything had to be viewed from that point--the idea of unifying, the idea of ignoring differences, of denying differences in such a way that everybody would be the same. Of course, this was an effective course against previous agreements which the

Spanish government had signed. I'm talking, for instance, of what they called the fueras (regional rights), which the regions of Spain had accepted to belong to Spain. All the rights were simply trampled and denied on December 5. And this is again happening today in Spain--the beginnings of the autonomies and so forth.

Echeverria: Do you have feelings about this?

Fernandez: My feelings about that? Maybe it was necessary at that time to be high-handed and to try to defy the people. I don't feel that when you are down and out you can be divisive and can tolerate this feeling of separatism and so forth. With Franco my personal opinion is this: there was a civil war, and Franco won the war. What he did the first year of his regime was necessary. Personally, I feel he prolonged his stay in power too long. He ought to have opened up to democracy way before his death. He did not tolerate any attempt to democratize elections and so forth, so people in Spain were not prepared or educated for democracy. In my opinion what's happening today in Spain, the difficulties with the democratic process, is one of the biggest handicaps, because of Franco.

Echeverria: I see. That's very clear. What about your mother and father? What do you remember of their views about the war and the time after?

Fernandez: For some reason politics was a hush-hush thing in our family.

Not even my brothers talked of that. We had relatives (first cousins) who had fought on the opposite side in the war. I don't think that my parents had any feelings of hatred or whatever against them. Talk about those things was not welcome. You simply lived on your side of the fence, and they lived on their side of the fence, and there was not communication at all.

Echeverria: So whereas before the war they did communicate, after the war they no longer stayed in touch.

Fernandez: Yes. And even today they have nothing to do with the war. When I go home, I make a conscious attempt to meet these cousins and be friendly and so forth. Now we do talk, but there is always an invisible obstacle in between even though we never mention anything about politics or the past. And it's a kind of a fence, and I try to present myself as a non-political person that has nothing to do with their side. I'm simply a friend and a relative and so forth. We communicate, _but_....

Echeverria: It's difficult to do that.

Fernandez: Very. I wonder if other civil wars in other parts of the world experience this prolonged feeling of separation, of not being able to communicate. I wonder.

Echeverria: That's a very good question.

Fernandez: These feelings are there forever--forever. And I see my nephews hardly communicating with young men their age whose

parents belonged to the other side. So there are some things that keep on driving them, and I don't know why. In bigger places, I suppose, these feelings are diffused and disappear in the crowds. But in a little place where everybody is closer, more in touch with each other and each thing, these things are not easily forgotten.

Echeverria: There are some authors who try to say that it's the Spanish character--the character of Spain--to remember these bitternesses.

Fernandez: Maybe. Maybe it's that we are not able to forget. I just don't know if that would be a unique characteristic. I've been to the Philippines; I've lived here in Texas fourteen years. I see people remembering events and the feelings that go with them as much as we would.

Echeverria: You're probably right (chuckle). But that's interesting that your folks did not...they had lost a son in the Civil War, and other family members probably did, too. They did not particularly discuss this.

Fernandez: No. If the thoughts or the conversation would ever fall on my departed brother, it was when we saw pictures or clippings from a newspaper or something. There was never a conscious effort to shut it out. The family simply didn't ...life just went on. Life just went on. I'm sure that all of them were hurting much more than me, since I was very small when this happened. I'm not aware of any conscious

attempt either to shut out the memory of my brother or to revive it and try to stir up emotions as a consequence of it.

Echeverria: Father, in our talk the other day, you mentioned that you know your friends--like in the town of Alsasua--by what funeral you attended. I'm wondering, in your view, what the effect of the war was on your town. You've said a little bit about it.

Fernandez: Very divisive. Very deep and lingering antagonisms. My town was completely divided. Since we were on the border between the two fronts--the Republicans' and Franco's--some of the people went to one side and some went to the other side simply because...well, "they're coming, they're coming, they're coming," so you go to the mountains to run away from any kind of war. In the mountains you find yourself on this side, so you join this side; in the mountains you also find yourself on the other side, so you join the other side. Just like that! First of all, people were tremendously ignorant about communism and what had been happening. So it was more that they were victims of circumstances by the conscious joint effort of this group or that group. They were politicized, the people in general. Now there were, of course, some of them who knew what the chiefs were saying and therefore knew where they wanted to go.

The police in our town, Ayera, was very much on the Republican side and therefore against Franco. As a consequence, he

had had open battles against the bishop. As a consequence, the town was subsequently divided. When Franco's front was nearing the town, he went over to Toulouse. Then he disappeared, and we found out later on that he was in Argentina. I think I mentioned the last time that he wrote "Nunca Me Avergonce' de Evangelic" wherein he writes about his experience and his feelings and so forth. Not many years ago, there was an attempt to bring him back from Argentina and to revive the old feelings that in a way some people thought had been ignored and had submerged underground.

You know, people just capture two or three men in a house, bring them to the mountains, shoot them, and bury them and leave them there. In the mountains there are what they call the cimas or holes in the ground, and they're simply shot and thrown over there. But recently there have been a couple of monuments built in these places where these people were shot and buried. Since they were not given a religious burial at the time, they organized tremendously popular and well-attended funerals reviving the old sentiments and incidents and all that. Franco's people were defeated in this town, and everybody went against them. Now they are bringing up those memories and trying to redeem these events and themselves, and there has been no healing of all of this prolonged past.

Echeverria: In many ways you're saying that emotionally the war is not over.

Fernandez: No, certainly not. Certainly not. Even though many of the people that fought in the war have died, possibly that's one of Franco's handicaps. But because he proclaimed that he was the victor and went on with this proclamation forever, the other side felt defeated forever. Instead of just simply going to the defeated and saying, "We are the same," the two opposites were still fighting each other. Emotionally, they're still there. The present regime is at least trying to be more subdued, but, of course, the defeated side is now trying to redeem itself. As of now, our history is being rewritten from the standpoint of both sides and so forth. I'm not an historian. I simply lived there for a while in history. Naturally, I have personal views. Is this all right?

Echeverria: Yes, certainly. I asked you some questions earlier about being able to talk politics in the seminary. When you go back to the Basque country, when you go back to your Cappuchin monastery, what is being taught there now?

Fernandez: About politics, you mean?

Echeverria: Yes. How is politics handled there now?

Fernandez: Mostly, they deal with the present because the present is so conflicting unless you go into history and look it up in the book and find out, "Hey, look what is written here." Unless you talk about it first-hand. The E.T.A. movement and the constant demonstrations and the shooting and the

killing, the economic situation...the present is so involving that it gives you no opportunity to go into the past unless you very consciously look for it.

Echeverria: How about E.T.A.? Are there any views in the monastery regarding the E.T.A. movement? Are young priests instructed to stay away from that?

Fernandez: No, they talk differently about E.T.A. They do.

Echeverria: They wouldn't be kneeling for lunch (chuckle).

Fernandez: No. One of our young guys was in jail accused of having intervened in the shooting of several policemen and so forth. I would say, Jeri, the general feeling is that most friars are satisfied with the present trend in autonomy. Some people are trying to compare it to U.S. federalism wherein each state has some rights but still belongs to the union. Most are satisfied with that arrangement. There is a little pocket of extreme people who are not satisfied, and those are the promotors of E.T.A. The present autonomy is emphasizing Basque things and Basque culture. I think everybody agrees that that is something very positive.

But in many places these schools, _ikostolas_, together with the culture, produce ideology. So many of their students who are learning Basque and the traditions and so forth are receiving indoctrinations in separatism. As a consequence, most of the E.T.A. members come from _ikastolas_. Because of that, therefore, there is a strong questioning on

whether this is the right approach.

Echeverria: Now the *ikastola* movement began in an effort to teach people to speak Basque after it had been outlawed for so many years.

Fernandez: That's right.

Echeverria: I see.

Fernandez: E.T.A. is a small movement.

Echeverria: In your experience you've probably run into priests who are on all sides of the fence on this one.

Fernandez: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. And, there again, you have to be extremely tactful in assigning this priest here and this priest there. There is a place, Renteria, that is a hotbed of E.T.A. movement.

Echeverria: Viscaya, isn't it?

Fernandez: No, it's in Guipuzcoa.

Echeverria: Guipuzcoa?

Fernandez: Yes, that's right. We had lost in that place maybe eight or ten young priests. After a few years of working with the youth...there's a tremendous youth activity in the parish there--dances, language, mountain climbing, music, and so forth. E.T.A. influenced them all. Things became so bad that they shut their doors on the youth, and they said, "You don't enter here anymore." So E.T.A. is looking for groups to influence and politicize everyday, even in the church. So you have to be extremely careful of this, and

they had to expel the youth.

Echeverria: When you say you lost some priests there, how do you mean that you lost them?

Fernandez: We lost them because in working with the youth for a while, they thought it was more important for them to be political than to be a priest, to influence society and then to function as a religious leader. When they got their priorities reversed, then they left.

Echeverria: So as they became increasingly more involved in E.T.A., they left.

Fernandez: Sure. Oh, yes. It is very, extremely difficult to minister there--extremely difficult. The atmosphere in society is so restless. Ideology is just everywhere.

Echeverria: I've been told that after the Civil War, Franco applied some pressure on the Spanish Catholic Church to redistribute all the priests so that the Basque priests would not be in the Basque country. This happened all throughout Spain, but that was particularly so among Basque priests. One, did that happen? Second, if so, was it effective?

Fernandez: It happened. Definitely it happened. I mentioned before, I think, that many of our guys were sent to Chile and Argentina and so forth by the hierarchy under orders from Franco--most certainly. Was it effective? First, it created resentment; second, it created bitterness; third, it created submerged feelings of people who then sympathized against

Franco but wouldn't dare express their feelings because of the consequences. Was it effective? It was effective as a deterrent from priestly involvement in political movements. I think it made Franco's priests more daring, more powerful, more influential, more naturally supportive of Franceo without any opposition; and that is why Franco's clergy for so many years were the power of the state. And that is why after so many years there was only a one-sided church, which again was siding with the government, which again is wrong because we are not to side with anybody. Maybe nobody wanted that at the beginning, but that is the way it was after twenty years or more. The hierarchy was chosen by...as you know, Franco had certain powers in selecting the bishops, so all the bishops appointed in Spain were on Franco's side. If you were not on Franco's side, even though you could be a brain and a pious person, you'd have no chance at all. So it was Franco's church. Because of their power, one side in the church just simply overpowered everything.

Echeverria: It's very interesting, isn't it, that the hierarchy was chosen by Franco, but then the hierarchy was telling seminarians to not be political.

Fernandez: Yes. Well, the hierarchy was not chosen by Franco. Let's understand that statement. The hierarchy was chosen by Rome, by the Holy Father, but Franco had the authority to present...

Echeverria: To recommend.

Fernandez: ...three. Then Rome is supposed to choose one of those three. For many years one of those three was chosen. Now I understand it is not so. I hope it has now faded out. Yes, most bishops, I think, were realistic enough, and the mentality, I think, was, it's clear now to say, "Yes, I owe my appointment to Franco, but I don't owe my total loyalty to him." It was true for many years that seminarian education was quite antiseptic, and there was nothing in politics other than Franco's side. Of course, on the northern side, there was no problem at all.

Echeverria: So this had probably been true in Catalan as well as...

Fernandez: Very much. Oh, yes. Catalonia was more effected by the war and the transition that followed.

Echeverria: And the church policy for those regions was probably more sensitive than the ones in the south.

Fernandez: Much more.

Echeverria: Well, Father, you've answered all my questions. Do you have any other observations?

Fernandez: On the aspects on the war or anything like that?

Echeverria: The war and the church particularly.

Fernandez: There is a phenomenon, Jeri, and, again, there's something written on this. Vocations mushroomed after the Civil War unbelievably--thousands upon thousands. Monastaries were were built up. We had 400 sisters. I had two cousins who

belonged to the Franciscan Missionary Seminary. I remember when visiting them in Pamplona when they had 300 novices. Novices, as you know, are one year. I have another cousin who is now in London--Servants of Mary. When you talk about 150 to 200 novices...you go to the seminary in Vitoria, which is in this region...by the way, the Cardinal Zucea, the new Archbishop of Madrid, comes from our area. He's the best, right? He was the rector of the seminary in Vitoria. One hundred forty priests are ordained every year, staffing whole dioceses in Latin America--Peru, Colombia, Venezuela. Maybe a hundred priests every year are down there from one diocese. It's the same from Pamplona, San Sebastian, Bilbao. Now the seminary is practically closed. I have no idea why. I don't have any idea. I'm sure there's something to explain it, but I don't. But it is a phenomenon.

Echeverria: And now...

Fernandez: Now it's down.

Echeverria: Way down.

Fernandez: Now it's way down. It's pitiful (chuckle). I think it is now suffering from the reaction to Franco's era--the lack of education for democracy and everything that goes with it. People are not prepared for this flooding that has occurred --pornography, divorces, abortions, whatever. They just plunged into it, and they feel that it is part of democracy, and that's that. On the other side, so many young people are

so much for everything that's against Franco. A couple of my nephews were in Nicaragua cutting cane, sugar cane, so the Nicaraguan youth could fight for the Sandanistas. There is just the desire to experiment, to observe, to see what is on the other side of the border. For so many years, they insisted on this, and now the feeling is, "We have to see, we have to experiment, we have to find out by ourselves." So the youth just falls apart without having any sense of direction. American youth, in spite of what people say, is much more stable. I think that our youth knows better than the Spanish youth what they want.

Echeverria: That's an interesting comparison.

Fernandez: We talk of the Spanish being very extreme-oriented. The pendulum goes either right or left--all the way. Well, that's what is happening now. It is all the way out, and I suppose it'll take some time before it settles somewhere.

Echeverria: Lots to do there. Well, Father, thank you very much for speaking to me about this important part of your life. I know it's been very dear to you, and I really enjoyed speaking with you.

Fernandez: Thank you, Jeri.