

Introduction

On Religious Nationalisms

The Staggering March from Sacralization to Politicization in Modern Spain

Gregorio Alonso and Claudio Hernández Burgos



Religion and power have historically entertained a very close relationship. As expressed by Amira K. Bennison, “From earliest historical times, belief that power has a divine aspect of some kind has been more or less universal” (Bennison 2021: 318). Spain is no exception, both under the guise of its bi-hemispheric empire and as the modern nation that emerged from the 1808 crisis. Recent controversies and media polemics have highlighted the political functions of the past in Spanish religious-political history and national identity. Some ultra-conservative sectors of the Popular Party and the far-right party Vox have recently tried to capitalize on the long-dismissed historiographical trope, arguing that Modern Spain was born out of the Crown’s fight against Islam. The process, which allegedly started right after the arrival of the North African troops and settlers in 711 CE, has traditionally been labeled as the “Reconquest.” The nineteenth-century conservative nation builders first identified the country’s past and soul with the protection of the Christian faith (García-Sanjuán 2018; Casquete 2023). However, at least since the 1950s, this version of the complex events and interactions that took place in the Iberian Peninsula up to the victory of the Christian troops signaled by their occupation of Granada in January 1492 has been revisited and questioned. The debate between the philologist Américo Castro and the historian Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, both Republican émigrés writing from exile in the United States and France, respectively, hinged on the notion of “Convivencia,” which was adamantly rejected by Sánchez Albornoz. According to the latter, there was no major cultural or ethnic cross-fertilization between the different ethnoreligious groups living

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in Spain's medieval territories and kingdoms. Isolation and disdain marked the relationship between new and old communities, and the Christian core of the preexisting settlers stayed unscathed, argued Sánchez Albornoz, with only sporadic and conflictual interchanges among them. According to Castro, however, Christians, Jews, and Muslims cohabited in the southern European peninsula for centuries, going through some conflictive episodes but mostly collaborating and tolerating one another. However, based on predating conservative readings of the past, the long-lasting effects of the official doctrine of National Catholicism under Franco's dictatorship consecrated the notion of an eternal and monolithic Christian Spain (Gómez-Martínez 1975; Lapeyre 1965; Morales Moya 2013; Payne 1984; and Viestenz 2014).

This collection aims to problematize this received understanding of Spain's cultural and political life. Relying on the latest historiographical findings and suggestions, the editors and the contributors unravel the multifaceted, oft-convulsive, and complex interpretation of the role of religion in the country's public life in the last two centuries. The vested interest shown by successive governments and rulers in attracting ecclesiastical support to their campaigns and policies often faced staunch defiance and resistance. Steering clear from easy identifications of modernity with the success of secularization, on the one hand, the chapters of this book show that different social and political groups did not diminish their adherence to Catholic traditions even when they embraced constitutional and even democratic values. On the other, these chapters demonstrate that the arrival and consolidation of the "age of nations" in Spain had distinct Catholic undertones and that the civil authorities borrowed the Church's social influence, discourse, and personnel to legitimize their rule and consecrate the emerging "Spanish nation" further. In so doing, they provoked hatred against modern notions of national sovereignty and popular participation in politics and, with the support of wide sectors of the clergy, the emergence of a truly Catholic reactionary movement that defied them in the press, in Parliament, and on the battlefields. These understudied features of the ideological transformations undergone by modern Spain deserve closer attention and study.

During the colonial expansion in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the monarchy and the Catholic Church collaborated very closely, and their alliance had a long-lasting impact on both. The 1496 papal concession of the title of Catholic monarchs to Queen Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragón by Alexander VI only highlighted it. The papal bull *Si convenit* that ratified it did feel as if it were compensation for their good services to the Church: expulsing the Jews from

their territories in 1492, protecting the pontifical interests in Naples and Sicily, waging their campaigns in northern Africa, and last but not least, “evangelizing” the Americas. For the following centuries, and not without frictions and conflicts, the Catholic monarchy did play an increasingly active role in protecting and promoting the Church in Europe and beyond. Its involvement in the defense of Catholicism became more visible and controversial during the so-called “wars of religion” that plagued Europe until at least the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended any religiously fueled altercation in most European territories.

Meanwhile, on the western shores of the Atlantic, religious orders, priests, and bishops would acquire immense wealth and influence, as well as a monopoly on education, arts, and culture in the newly acquired territories. The ecclesiastical bodies and staff enjoyed prominence in controlling, translating, and producing the religious-political discourses of submission and acceptance that embedded the imperial mission with a religious aura. But the consequences of this reliance on the clergy to exert political power and deliver some public goods in the New World exceeded the Crown’s ability to control the Church’s capacity to mold people’s attitudes, its overlapping authorities, and the overall results of its designs (Lynch 2012).

The long-term consequences of this close relationship became apparent and were publicly denounced in the second half of the eighteenth century. One such result was condemning Spain as a backward and ignorant country in French enlightened circles. As examined in Antonio Calvo Maturana’s contribution to this collection regarding the reception of Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers’s article on Spain in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert. Masson pointed to the excessive weight of the Catholic clergy to explain Spain’s alleged lack of scientific and technical prowess and to account for its supposed economic decline and fanatical leanings. Many Western imperial rivals shared these views, but they also struck a chord among the most forward-looking sectors of the local elites, as shown by Calvo Maturana. On the other hand, reformist ministers working for King Charles III like Pablo Olavide, influential theologians and writers like Jeronimo Feijóo, or outspoken critics of the Inquisition like Manuel Marchena wrote pamphlets, leaflets, and plays where they condemned clerical power abuses (Albiac-Blanco 2020; Fuentes 1989). Their attitude and bravery cost them dearly; most faced imprisonment or exile.

The 1808 crisis that shook the Spanish empire also had a religious dimension. More than two decades ago, José María Portillo first unraveled the close links between modern political thought and the emer-

gence of the nation, on the one hand, and the impact of the Catholic frameworks, mindsets, and institutional traditions, on the other. His groundbreaking monograph *La Nazione Cattolica* (1998), soon followed by *Revolución de Nación* (2000), opened new avenues of inquiry for scholars interested in Hispanic Liberalism. Regarding constitutional history and the history of law, Portillo's works echoed the growing academic interest on the links between religion, modern nations, and nationalism (Hastings 1997; Llobera 1994; Smith 2003). Arguably, his most innovative finding relates to the contemporary consensus among the parliamentarians who drafted and approved the first Spanish Constitution on the need for religious revival and reform as a prerequisite for the success of any political innovation. In so doing, Portillo highlighted the dual character of the first Spanish Constitution: inclusive and exclusionary. Spaniards were welcome to become citizens of the constitutionalized nation, but only those who belonged to the community of believers. This identification made successive colonial campaigns missionary, as Scott Eastman (2021) shows in his latest monograph.

Moreover, the commitment to religious intolerance stated in Article 12 of the 1812 Carta Magna further signaled a distinctly Catholic understanding of the political and civil nation. However, intertwining both sources of religious and political belonging would prove to be enduring and long-lasting. The religious intolerance declared in the successive constitutional articles that sanctioned it gave this union an unholy character. The sustained and explicit prohibition of the public display of any other religious symbols, rituals, or gatherings makes Modern Spain particularly interesting for those studying religious nationalism. The work by Scott Eastman in this book emphasizes the counterrevolutionary leanings of large sectors of the Catholic clergy during the germinal stages of Spanish experimentation with the Liberal rule.

Moreover, his chapter convincingly emphasizes the Atlantic dimensions of the ecclesiastical resistance against the reformist spirit of the Spanish Cortes. Eastman, however, also highlights the keen collaboration of some other clerics with the new authorities, thus denying the received assumption of the immemorial existence of “two Spains,” clerical and the anticlerical. Indeed, the situation seems to have been far more complex and nuanced. Not least because “Spain” was defined as a “bi-hemispherical” entity in the 1812 Constitution, and it comprised a multitude of overlapping ethnic and cultural communities living together as members of the same monarchy and the same religious group (Eastman 2012); it was also because, with the protection of the faith by the Crown, there came an escalation of the jurisdictional and

ideological disputes with the ecclesiastical authorities. As recently highlighted by Pedro Rújula (2023), the unwavering commitment to the Catholic tradition and staunch monarchism drove the violent opposition to constitutional rule from the French Revolution to the 1840s, leading to civil wars in 1808, 1822, and 1833. It should not surprise that the emerging liberal ruling classes felt obliged to make concessions and provided the ecclesiastical bodies with protected status.

The Catholic Church enjoyed the status of an established church in Spain ever since 1812 up to 1978, except for the two short-lived Republican experiences between 1873 and 1874 and 1931 and 1939. Furthermore, not even the most advanced Liberals, the Progressives, fully committed to secularizing plans. Apart from the sale at auction of the Church's lands in the 1830s, 1850s, and 1860s, they willingly accepted the need for the state's control over the clergy, even if it meant paying for their salaries. María Cruz Romeo and Jesús Millán duly underline in their chapter that this attachment to religious intolerance stemmed from the declaration of national sovereignty and the control by the civilian authorities of spiritual matters, understood as both expressions of the national character and political instruments. At the same time, key Romantic poems and novels portrayed a heroic Christian medieval Castile besieged by Jews and Muslims as the direct ancestor of the newly created Spanish nation-state (Andreu Miralles 2016: 149–68).

All the same, political consensus and the literary canon do not always necessarily reflect political interests, let alone social realities. The reduction of the wealth and power of ecclesiastical institutions went along with the historical development of Liberalism during the nineteenth century. Thus, the contribution by María Cruz Romeo and Jesús Millán highlights how the emergence of the neo-Catholic organizations aimed to repel most liberal ecclesiastical reforms, combined with the societal impact of the erratic and ultraconservative conduct of the monarch Queen Isabel II, ultimately boosted the cause for religious tolerance. Despite the comparative weakness of the movement and its belated consolidation, the support for secularism and the expansion of Freethought gathered momentum in the late 1800s. It would be forward-looking and reformist middle-class Republicanism (Sanabria 2009; Suárez Cortina 2014), on the one hand, and the organized working classes, both in their Socialist and Anarchist varieties, on the other, that would embrace it and make it rank high in their agendas (De la Cueva Merino 1994; De la Cueva Merino and Montero, 2012).

Likewise, the conflict with the Church and the rejection of its political alliances often took a violent form. Violent anticlericalism, accord-

ing to national and international historians (Callahan 1984; Diettrich 2014; La Parra and Suárez Cortina 1998; Pérez Ledesma 2001; Schapiro 1967), proved to be a salient and unique feature of the process of social and political modernization in Spain. Although Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy witnessed the development of anticlerical movements, the latter two cases were often linked to the nationalistic struggles to build their nation-states. However, unlike in Spain, activists seldom resorted to violence. Comparative historiographical works have noted the existence in Spain of similar trends within the so-called “culture wars” that spread across Europe in the 1860s: “Spaniards always stand behind their priests—either with candles in hand to light a procession, or sticks to beat them up.” As this old joke suggests, Catholic popular piety and militant anticlericalism took on forms in the Iberian Peninsula that were extreme by European standards (Clark and Kaiser 2003: 47).

This depiction illustrates well the environment under which first appears Spanish neo-Catholicism, i.e., a spread network of lay and clerical groupings and individuals who resented and resisted the Italian nationalist threat against the civil authority of Pope Pius IX. Publicists such as José Donoso Cortés or Jaime Balmes became the most active representatives of the counterrevolutionary understanding of Catholicism, even if their viewpoints differed (Acle-Kreyslig 2023). This new generation of believers became activists and showed a keen ability to establish a confessional movement across national borders. Drawing on the transnational networks and institutions provided by the Catholic Church, they signed parliamentary petitions, raised funds, and organized politico-religious rallies and mobilizations (García Pérez 2020; Palacios Cerezales 2022). Even if the clergy were deeply involved in its inner workings and press outputs, this new movement constituted a grassroots response to the social mobilization that accompanied the consolidation of popular political participation and the increasingly tense relation between Liberalism and Catholicism. As comparable cases show, “the politicization of religion and emergence of religious, political identity in the modern era is firmly anchored in the rise of mass religious movements—a hitherto unknown phenomenon. These movements became the main instruments for fulfilling the newly developed religious, socio-political vision” (Yildirim 2003).

In this context, the Catalan priest Félix Sardá y Salvany published his famous work *El Liberalismo es pecado* (*Liberalism Is a Sin*) (1884), where he reminded readers of the many substantial contributions that the Catholic faith had made to Spain and condemned Liberal thought since times immemorial. The Carlistas—the legitimist movement and

true counterrevolutionary force that emerged in nineteenth-century Spain—immediately adopted his neo-Catholic arguments. They reinforced the alleged co-substantiality between Catholicism and Spanishness (Romeo Mateo 2021). His ideas echoed and popularized those of Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, the influential writer and academic who authored the encyclopaedical *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* (1880–82), when he argued—in an article published in 1883—that “the identification between the Catholic faith and the national character has always existed amongst us (Spanish people), to the extent that they constituted the same thing” (Sardá 1883).

Works like Sardá’s reflected a peculiar historical crossroads not unique to Spain. On the contrary, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, several European states implemented secularizing policies that aimed to reduce the influence of the Church in the public sphere and thus threatened its privileged status. In 1870, advanced liberal governments provisionally approved civil burials, marriages, and even freedom of worship (confined to the private sphere by the 1876 Constitution). The legislative innovations saw the light when workers’ and regionalist movements consolidated. Faced with these changes and challenges, European Catholics revised their ideological and strategic agendas, modernized their repertoires of mobilization, and struggled to conquer new social institutions and political arenas, i.e., schools, universities, the press, gender relations, and the public space (Suárez Cortina 2015). They lobbied and stayed organized to guarantee that the only valid national project would follow Catholic teachings in this new battle in a longer “culture war,” ensuring that the ecclesiastical organizations and beliefs shape it (Ramón Solans 2015).

This revamped identification between the Catholic and the national spirit drew on some common features and adaptations (Millán and Romeo 2010). Both nations and religious organizations celebrate commemorations, ceremonies, and rites. They also try to frame and inform daily life activities and spaces and can enthuse and mobilize conscious members (Smith 1999, 2003). No wonder nationalistic leaders and parties relied on their version of those symbols and rituals to build and boost nationalizing languages and cultures (Hastings 1997; Smith 1999). Beyond those common traits, religious and national sources provided ideal platforms for creating individual and private identities while informing social imaginaries where national and religious boundaries blurred. These strong bonds also determined the cultural production of Spanish poets, writers, and playwrights. As masterfully underscored in work by Noël Valis, “a reenvisioned Catholicism” played “a fundamental imaginative-creative role in key texts

of modern Spanish narrative from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, creating a special form a sacred realism” (Valis 2010: 5). More recent works (Cordoba and García-Donoso 2016) have emphasized both the durability of the influence of the sacred in Spanish cultural production, on the one hand, and its reflection on urban planning and city life, on the other.

Furthermore, these complex cultural mechanisms acted as devices both for inclusion and exclusion (Brubaker 2012: 7–8). The overlapping of the religious and the national spheres led to both the sacralization of the nation and the nationalization of the sacred, which resulted in the emergence of a new set of shared symbols, practices, and discourses, as well accompanying public policies (Brubaker 2012: 8–9). The process, however, can also be seen as an ideological realignment of class interests under mature Liberalism. Borrowing Ludger Mees’s words, it can be argued that “this fusion between reactionary Catholicism and conservative nationalism gave rise to the new amalgam of National Catholicism as an ideology for the legitimation of the conservative ruling elites” (Mees 2020: 25). This phenomenon was also noticeable in regions where social movements and political parties successfully transitioned from regionalism to nationalism. Similar dynamics and the weight and leadership of some clerics and Catholic leaders are noticeable indeed in both the Basque (Álvarez Gila 1999; Martínez Rueda 2017) and the Catalan (Reina 1992; Smith 2004; Vila i Vicente 2005) nascent nationalist movements.

The historical emergence of this National-Catholic amalgam did not go unchallenged, though, and the claim to represent Christian traditions was also available for political opponents. Progressive, Democrat, and Republican associations started embracing the cause for secularization and, inspired by their Belgian, French, and Italian counterparts, pledged to separate the Church from the state. Ester García Moscardó devotes her contribution to this book to unraveling the tensions generated by the consolidation of Republican movements in Spain by closely examining the role of the writer and activist Roque Barcia. Her chapter suitably shows the Christian undertones and rhetoric used by the Democratic and Republican media in defense of what they considered to be the true teachings of Jesus Christ, condemning papal impositions over the Church (Barnosell 2012; Serrano García 2018). These alternative narratives informed a secularized version of nationalism without embracing atheism. Moreover, in a country where Freethought was marginal, isolated, and comparatively weak, this Christian, universalistic understanding of the nation as inherently democratic reflected the complexities and limitations of secularizing political endeavors.

As the Republican and early Socialist activist and historian Fernando Garrido put it, “To be Republican is to be a Christian in the true meaning of the term” (Garrido 1855, cited in Abbou Francés 2019: 640).

Following widespread Western trends, between the 1870s and 1930s, Spain witnessed the rise of mass politics relying on a comparatively long process of learning about representative government and experimentation with Liberal politics (Ginger 2019). The increasingly problematic overpowering role and monopoly of the Catholic Church in crucial civil matters was due to its established character. The struggles to permanently secularize marriage, education, and cemeteries became new targets of media attention, political mobilization, and parliamentary debate. Even if there were fewer instances of violent outbursts, despite the 1899–1901 cycle and 1909 Tragic Week (Ullman 1968; Laqua 2014; and Thomas 2013), the identification of Spanish nationhood and Catholicism became one of the most divisive cleavages among the citizenry, and it would lead to the ideological conflict and mobilization that characterized Spain’s twentieth-century public life.

Therefore, the parallel processes of secularization and modernization defined the arrival of the age of mass politics and its historical configuration. In the last three decades, there has been a debate on the strength and success of the process of mass nationalization (De Riquer 1994), mostly due to the presence of substate nationalistic movements and diverging regional identities. The advocates for the “weak nationalization” thesis have highlighted the weight of Catholic traditions as an important hurdle in that process. However, recent research has shown how Catholic values and beliefs, despite the conflicts mentioned above between the state authorities and the Church, did have a positive impact on the transmission and reproduction of nationalizing messages (Archilés 2008; Andreu Miralles 2016; Louzao and Rodríguez Lago 2016). The preservation of both “Catholic unity” and the indissolubility of the Spanish nation constituted the driving forces of the political and organizational reaction led by the ecclesiastical hierarchies and lay movements during the Restoration monarchy (1874–1923), as shown in the chapter by Pilar Salomón. Their campaign intensified after the 1898 “Disaster,” the popular name given to the loss of the remnants of the Spanish overseas territories after a humiliating chain of defeats against US forces, both in the Antilles and in the Pacific. It would be then that eucharistic congresses, pilgrimages, and religious services multiplied, and the Catholic masses flexed the newly found mobilizing muscle in the streets and squares across the country. The subsequent colonial wars in Morocco and some variants of the movements for national regeneration were also embedded in deeply entrenched Catholic

values and visions (Balfour 2001; Louzao 2013; Ramón Solans 2014; and Salomón Chéliz 2021).

The year 1917 was an important milestone in this process, as shown by Salomón. The growing conflicts affecting industrial relations and the re-energized workers' movement after the successful Bolshevik revolution further radicalized the worldviews held by Conservatives and Catholics (Weir 2015; De la Cueva Merino 2018). The new threats spurred them to make new use of religious symbols and institutions in their struggle to define and control the meaning of national belonging, also at regional and local levels (De la Cueva Merino 2000; Salomón Chéliz 2002; and Blasco Herranz 2018). The renewed politicized sense of Catholic identity, in the shape of National Catholicism, would be the result of the interplay of the nationalizing efforts of the counterrevolutionary intellectual elites, on the one hand, and the daily practices, symbols, and beliefs of everyday popular nationalisms, on the other (Botti 1998: 90–95; Louzao and Rodríguez Lago 2016: 80–81). The consecration of Spain to the Holy Heart of Jesus in 1919 by King Alphonse XIII constituted another crucial milestone of this ideological trajectory (Esteve Martí 2021).

The military coup headed by General Miguel Primo de Rivera on 13 September 1923 paved the way for the consolidation of National Catholicism as the official state doctrine (Quiroga 2004, 2007; María Muñoz 2020). The coordinated efforts of the army, the Church, and schools served this purpose. As shown by the contribution by Alejandro Quiroga in this book, the Church happily became an ally of the dictatorship in the construction of corporative state machinery, the establishment of the single party, Unión Patriótica, and its campaigns of mass nationalization. The 1930 dismissal of Primo de Rivera and the end of the regime the following year put an end to this first experiment with National Catholic politics.

For many Catholics and conservatives alike, establishing the Spanish Second Republic in April 1931 was a major threat to their notion of Sacred Spain (Montero and De la Cueva Merino 2007). No wonder, in its aftermath, some sectors of the clergy and their organizations launched a campaign to protect the status quo (Montero 2007). They perceived that the national and civic Republican project undermined the foundations of National Catholicism (Holguín 2002). These sectors immediately resented the state's control over the ecclesiastical institutions, the redefinition of national rites and symbols, and the expulsion of the Catholic masses from public spaces. Moreover, as argued by Teresa Ortega in her chapter, the transformation of the societal role of women on the national stage and the new ideals of femininity were also rejected from the outset by these conservative sectors. Under the

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Second Republic, it became clearer than ever before that the role assigned to the Catholic faith in the national imaginary, as well as that given to the ecclesiastical authorities, became one of the thorniest issues in Spanish political and social life (Salomón Chéliz 2002; De la Cueva Merino 2014).

The struggles around the most suitable sense of nationhood for the Spanish people and the part that Catholicism should play in it led to new tensions and conflicts. However, in July 1936, the fight became primarily violent after disgruntled members of the army launched a coup against the Republican government with the collaboration of other relevant social and political actors. The Rebels' ideologues and propagandists depicted their attack as a defensive movement for the sake of Catholic, traditional Spain. Religion would become a mobilizing tool in the erection of a "New Spain." Moreover, most bishops sacralized the war, labeling it a "Holy War" or "Crusade" in a campaign where the fatherland was even identified with a suffering Jesus Christ. In their view, the Republican reforms had severely harmed the religious nerve of the nation, and given that they regarded Catholicism as a co-substantial and inalienable element of Spain's nationhood, their project was to dismantle the policies approved by the "enemies of God and Spain," including their secularizing policies (Núñez Seixas 2006: 192–95).

On the other hand, the outbreak of a series of anticlerical outbursts in the Republican rearguard somehow validated their religious justification for their violent attempt to destroy the Republic. It made their military targets expiatory victims for their own "sins" in a totalitarian project aimed to purge and purify the nation (Vincent 2009). As César Rina shows, this sacralized understanding of the war was not confined to mere rhetoric. Still, it manifested itself in expiatory practices of re-Catholicization, forcefully accepted by the terrorized, or enthusiastic, people as the necessary punishment that should lead to the birth of the "new nation." In this process, the festivities and public devotions worshipped in folk religion would be politically adapted and became a key tool at the local level to make the true colors of Franco's "new nation" visible (Hernández Burgos 2020). While the fighters on the battlefield were identified as "Christ's soldiers," in the rearguard campaign masses, via crucis, the redeployment of crucifixes in public buildings and squares and similar civic-religious initiatives aimed to achieve the transformation of war-torn Spain into "God's Kingdom" (Del Arco Blanco 2018).

After the Fascist victory in 1939, the re-Catholicization campaign became part and parcel of the new regime's political, social, and cultural building process. Despite the original lack of consensus among the different sectors who supported Franco and the rebels and their

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clashing political cultures, National Catholicism became the crux of the rhetoric and policies enforced by the regime headed by General Franco. It informed its ideological definition and impregnated the new family model and the different cultural platforms designed to reconquer the public arena (Callahan 1984; Morcillo 2007). From an aesthetic point of view, the sacred also became politicized, leading to an artificial whole. While only superficial, the overlap between the national and the religious provides a monolithic sense of nationhood that leaves no room for alternative narratives of public or private identity (Molina Aparicio 2017). The monopoly over public demonstrations and ceremonies enjoyed by the Church heavily confirmed Spain as a missionary nation, especially after 1945 and the defeat of Nazi Germany and its Fascist allies. From that point onward, the preeminence of Catholic intellectuals, opinion leaders, and public policymakers would grow and go unchallenged.

However, despite their best efforts and due to the deep transformation affecting the Catholic Church, their position would become untenable. It would be apparent after the celebration of the Vatican Council II (1962–65) that the National Catholic project was about to collapse in Spain once the pope and the council stopped supporting the authoritarian rule and embraced democratic values and respect for human rights. Moreover, grassroots lay organizations, young local priests, and specialized ecclesiastical organizations such as the *Hermanidad Obrera de Acción Católica* (Catholic Action's Workers Brotherhood) took a critical distance from the Church's past attachment to and ideological legitimization of the regime. However, the older and more influential members of the hierarchy exhibited more enduring loyalty to the old values and wariness for alleged dangerous innovations (Alonso 2011; Cazorla 2013; Ortíz Heras and González Martín 2011). The late years of Francoism thus witnessed an unexpected cleavage among Catholics, which impacted the religious and institutional dimensions of Catholicism in Spain and questioned the sheer definition of its national project. The new tensions also affected the leading echelons of the Church, and they faced serious challenges after the dictator's death in November 1975 (Díaz Burillo 2019). With the recovery of the democratic system, the Church needed to envisage new strategies for adaptation and survival. As shown by the contribution to this volume by Vicente Díaz and Alicia Domínguez, the Catholic hierarchy was forced to accept the introduction of religious freedom, the modernization of societal mores and values, the decay of religious practice, and a speedy process of secularization of society and the laicization of the state (Linden 2009; Meyer Resende 2015). However, all these changes did not put an end to mass Catholicism.

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On the contrary, spurred by the new measures affecting family law, reproductive rights, and the Church's finances, the clergy redefined their tactics to influence society. This strategic and ideological move has affected how Catholics envisage their nation or nations. As cultural critiques and historians have shown in the last decades, Spain has undergone different waves of secularization and religious change (Pérez Agote 2010). And their impact on real-life choices and fictional works can be seen in the attitudes, rituals, and representations of death (Cordoba and García-Donoso 2016). However, the unremitting presence of Catholic codes, norms, and ceremonies faces new historical challenges and opportunities that could lead to a renewed alliance with nationalistic practices and discourses or their partisan reappropriation by incumbent political parties and movements.

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