4. Old orders and new: The nuns as historical actors

For the nuns in Spain, the key event thrusting them into modernity came, perhaps surprisingly, not from awareness of social change or external political movements but from within the Catholic Church itself. This pivotal event was the holding of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, 1962–65). As Buddhist belief and practices in Thailand were historically linked to the monarchy and a conservative political regime, so a narrowly traditional Catholicism was used in Spain in the first half of the twentieth century to contain the forces of modernisation and to legitimise a largely feudal framework of social and political relations. The religious order to which the nuns belonged was implicated in these structures and, despite their experience of the Second Republic (proclaimed in 1931) and the Civil War (1936–39), it shaped the nuns’ understanding of what constituted a good society. By their own accounts, Vatican II initiated their religious awakening and became the instrument of their political awakening. This happened at, and then combined with, the very moment of the rise of anti-Franco modernising social and political forces. Many of the nuns came to a view—and to act on that view—that a good society was impossible without social justice and its basis in human rights.

Ethnographic continuities and discontinuities

We left Bangkok with our then twenty-month-old daughter in April 1977. At the time of my husband’s posting to Spain at the beginning of 1981, we had three children. Madrid promised a hospitable environment for family and social life. It also challenged me to approach it ethnographically: a new culture, a new history, a new country experiencing modernisation after almost 40 years of dictatorship. The invitation was irresistible, because of, as well as despite, the serendipitous character of my being in Madrid rather than in some other place. I wanted to know Madrid and its people; I wanted to participate in their world, understand who they were and how they related to each other and to the outside world, to test the romance of the Spanish Civil War against the realities of people’s experience then and now and of the legacy that remained for them. I wanted to gather the material from their everyday lives that would allow me to write another critical ethnography of a people in transition.

In an ideal world of consistency rather than of practical contingency, I would have built more directly on my Thai research and pursued my interest in labour relations. In real time and space, with three small children, no previous Spanish
studies and no contacts in the industrial world, I decided against it. Instead, I made a judgement about the possible and moved to a topic in which I had extensive knowledge, experience and friendships: that of nuns.

The first encounter

The first hint that I would find a political and social situation in Spain that was closer than I had expected to the one that we had encountered in Thailand came when we boarded the plane in Athens around breakfast time on 24 February 1981. On hearing that our final destination was Madrid, one of the Qantas crew commented that there had been a coup in Madrid on the day before. He didn’t know the outcome; we had several anxious days in Rome and little access to English-language news. It was not until we arrived in Madrid that we learnt that the attempted coup had failed. We also learnt that, on 23 February, tanks rolled in the streets of Valencia under the direction of General Jaime Milans del Bosch. In Madrid, about 200 soldiers and members of the Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) stormed the Cortes, the lower house of the Spanish Parliament. They were led by an officer of the Guardia Civil, Colonel Antonio Tejero Molina. Firing automatic weapons, they took hostage the more than 300 Members of Parliament and held them for most of the next 24 hours. Convinced of the King’s approval, Tejero called on him to make an announcement supporting the coup.

Comparisons between Thailand and Spain would have been vigorously rejected by most Spaniards. On the one occasion when I suggested the comparison to my friend Luz González, she was quite shocked and offended. It seemed to me then, however, as it does now, that the parallels were demonstrable. In perhaps equally informative ways, so, too, were the differences. Like the Thai coup of 1976 four and a half years before, 23 February also demonstrated contested ideas about the good and about what makes a good society. It involved the military, the paramilitary Guardia Civil, right-wing groups and the monarchy. Spain had experienced only five years of democracy—another ‘democratic experiment’\(^1\)—since the 36-year dictatorship of General Francisco Franco Bahamonde, who died in November 1975.

Unlike in Thailand, in Spain, the attempted coup of 1981—driven by many similar forces—did not succeed. Contrary to the expectations of the plotters, and many others, King Juan Carlos did not give his support. On the contrary, he actively opposed it and his opposition was the key to its failure. As soon as he was informed of the attack on the Cortes, he established a non-military administrative government base at the Zarzuela Palace and, using his position

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\(^1\) Preston (2004: 459).
as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, contacted senior military officers to make clear that he did not support the coup and to demand their loyalty. At 1.15 am on 24 February, he made a nationwide televised broadcast from a mobile unit of RTVE, condemned the coup, and ordered its leaders to surrender. The tanks slowly withdrew from the streets of Valencia and, later that morning, Tejero released the parliamentarians. He was arrested, together with General Milans del Bosch and some others involved in the plot.²

As in Bangkok, I experienced the extraordinary events of these times through the response of ordinary Spaniards, their public insistence that they rejected a return to the authoritarian past and, whatever the problems, were committed to the peaceful implementation of a full democracy. We spent our first night in Madrid in a hotel in the centre of the city, overlooking the Plaza Colón and the massive demonstration of an estimated million and a half people who marched in support of democracy. A further million and a half marched in other cities across the country. Once again, it was raining, but this time the cold drizzle of a Madrid winter.

Pilar Duarte, one of the nuns who had grown up after the end of the Civil War, described her anxiety when she got back from her teaching day on the evening of 23 February and turned on the radio. What she heard was not the usual programs, but a news bulletin about the attack on the Parliament, followed exclusively by martial music. A small renegade unit had taken over the radio and television broadcasting studios (RTVE) at Prado del Rey and ordered that the station play only military music (although the RTVE Director-General managed to make these Baroque marches).³ For Pilar, the news and the music signalled a return to the Franco years (*el Franquismo*). She was appalled. Her reaction was shared by many of her contemporaries.

Some of the older nuns had experienced the disruptions, often violent, of the Second Republic (1931–36) and the Civil War (1936–39) and had seen the Franco regime as the proper victory of the forces on the side of God over los Rojos (the Reds). For them, a return to the values and apparent stability of the dictatorship would have been welcomed. Among this group of nuns were two sisters of General Alfonso Armada Comyn, one of the central plotters in the failed 23 February coup. When Armada was condemned to a long prison sentence, an acquaintance commiserating with his sisters was assured that it was not the General about whom they worried. It was another brother, a Jesuit, who had rejected the conservative religious and social values of the family, lived in a

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² ibid., pp. 472–85.
³ ibid., p. 478.
working-class district of Madrid and wore ordinary clothes. The family always kept a priest’s soutane hanging on the back of their front door so that, when he came to visit, he might dress in suitable clerical garb.

**Habit and habitus**

The different reactions of these three women to the attempted coup offered only one aspect of the very contrasting lifestyles that had emerged in their Congregation over the previous decade. All the nuns whom I came to know had been trained in the certainties of the pre–Vatican II religious understanding of the world. They remembered a life of monastic orderliness and routine organised around religious rituals: rising at 5.20 am, washing in cold water before dressing in the very complicated religious habit; meditation for an hour from 6 am; chanting of Lauds, the first Divine Office of the day; the celebration of Mass. Private examination of conscience was twice a day, for 15 minutes before lunch and 15 minutes and in the evening. More Divine Office was chanted at set times throughout the day, the Angelus prayed three times, and the Rosary; meals as a time for public self-accusation of faults; regulated time for personal prayer. And silence as the norm, with the Greater Silence rung in at 9.15 pm. Teaching, principally in schools for daughters of the elite, and other duties were encompassed within this spiritual timetabling. Each community had a hierarchy of authority, and a Superior to whom unquestioning obedience was owed. This was the standard against which the nuns measured not only the different ways in which they subsequently chose to live their daily lives, but also the transformation for many of them in their understanding of the good, and of what it meant to live a good life. The different responses to the attempted coup reflected the very different meanings that these women had come to give to their lives.

General Armada’s sisters continued to wear the religious habit, as they wished their Jesuit brother would do. They lived in traditional communities in the large convents belonging to the order, and, as they were no longer involved in teaching, followed an order of day dictated mainly by prayer and common religious observance. In each of these communities, one of the nuns was given the role of Superior by the Order’s provincial governing team. On the other hand, Pilar Duarte shared a *piso* (apartment) with four other nuns in a working-class district of high unemployment in Madrid, taught in a local adult education centre dedicated especially to improving literacy skills, and assisted in the Centre for the Disabled. All five members of her community wore secular clothes that they bought themselves. Their daily routines were organised by work, involvement in the local parish, shared domestic responsibilities, and some informal time in the evenings when they tried to eat and spend time together.
They had no fixed common schedule of prayer or other religious rituals but undertook these as a personal responsibility. Nor was any of the group willing to be named or to accept a local Superior.

These striking differences in lifestyle were recent and represented the largely generational differences that shaped the nuns’ various responses to Spain’s convulsive encounter with modernity. They also represented changing and newly diverse notions among the nuns of the good, and of the meaning of their religious life in terms of it being a good life within ‘the world’, or a better life in opposition to ‘the world’. These were questions that the nuns specifically confronted and articulated, at the international level of the Congregation, but also at the Provincial, community and personal levels. Carmen Vega, also working in an adult education centre and living in a small *piso* community but in a different Madrid neighbourhood, saw her religious life as one, but by no means the only, choice available to her as a Christian:

> We talk of Christian schools, Christian families, as though ‘Christian’ were an adjective. ‘Christian’ is a substantive. We are Christians *in* the schools, Christians *in* the family…The Christian is one who lives in different situations, whatever they may be. That is to say that, whatever the situation, the Christian transforms them or changes them by the way in which she or he lives them…The vow of chastity is a very functional vow in order to have a greater freedom.

This understanding of the religious life is close to Charles Taylor’s identification of one of the key aspects of modernity, and of a secular idea of the good—that is, the affirmation of ordinary life and the rejection of spiritual hierarchy.4 But Carmen Vega, like Pilar Duarte and many of their companions, had not entered the Congregation with this view. Nor did it represent the view of the nuns during the first century and more of their presence in Spain.

### The old order: History of the Society of the Sacred Heart in Spain

During this earlier period, the internal organisation of the Congregation, their relationship to the Roman Church and their form of education were all firmly hierarchical. Their view of the religious life was based on a Platonic and Augustinian separation of the temporal from the sacred order and of opposition between the spirit and the flesh, with religious life constituting a commitment to the spirit and a rejection of the flesh and, by association, of the world and of

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worldly pleasures. This commitment to the spiritual and a consequent rejection of the world was defined in terms a lifelong fidelity to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Withdrawal from the world was actualised by life in convents based on a fourth vow, that of ‘stability’. This vow confined the nuns to enclosure in a specific convent unless directed to move from there by their Superior. The religious habit, designed originally for simplicity, had become an elaborate costume suppressing individuality and femininity. Except in the classroom, and during scheduled breaks for recreation, silence was the norm, to be broken only when really necessary.

The nuns who arrived in Spain in the mid-nineteenth century were part of an international teaching order, the Society of the Sacred Heart, founded in France in 1800 for the education of girls. Members of the Society date its arrival in Spain from 1846 when the first permanent house was established in Sarria, near Barcelona. In fact, the first nuns had arrived in 1830, at the invitation of the Bishop of Gerona, who had offered them a house and whatever they needed. The timing of such a venture could not, from the point of view of the nuns themselves, have been worse. Their arrival came towards the end of what Carr calls ‘the ominous decade’, and of a long period of economic depression that had followed the War of Independence against Napoleon (1808–14). The time of their stay (1830–36) coincided with one of the periods of crisis in a century defined by crisis, and with the radical laws of Prime Minister Juan Álvarez Mendizábal. These laws had resulted in the suppression of convents and monasteries, the exclaustration or expulsion of monks and nuns, and the appropriation (desamortización) of church and monastic lands. From the time of the Society’s return to Spain 10 years later, in 1846, its alignment was with the Catholic bourgeoisie and, by extension, with the aristocracy. The first school was opened in 1848 in Sarria, to cater for the education of the daughters of wealthy Catholics who would otherwise have been sent to a Sacred Heart convent in France.

The second house, Chamartin de la Rosa, on the then outskirts of Madrid, was a gift of the Duke and Duchess of Pastrana in 1859. These patrons had already made a similar endowment to the Jesuits of a property opposite the nuns’, and were also later responsible for the gift to the Society of their own palace in Madrid (Leganitos in 1886). The school at Leganitos was named St Dionysius after the Duchess, Doña Dionisia. The school had in fact opened two years earlier in a smaller house, also bestowed by the Duke and Duchess. On the death

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5 Religiosas Del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (1946: 8).
of the Duke, however, the nuns moved to the ducal palace, and the Jesuits were invited by the Duchess to take over the nuns’ previous house for their pastoral activities.

The Countess of Villanueva was the benefactress of the third house. This was a former monastery in Seville, with a reputedly miraculous statue of Our Lady of the Valley. The monastery had been one of those seized in the disentailments (desamortización) of 1834–37, and the buildings had been converted into numerous small flats for families. The gift to the nuns meant the displacement of these families: ‘The cholera epidemic and the resistance of the ninety tenants, who were in no hurry at all to remove from the site, delayed until January, 1866, the definitive installation of the Mothers in Seville.’

Other houses—in Zaragoza (1875), Bilbao (1876), Madrid (Caballero de Gracia, 1877), Barcelona (Diputación, 1888), Valencia (Godela, 1898), San Sebastian (1903), Palma de Mallorca (Son Español, 1902), Las Palmas, the provincial capital of the Canary Islands (1903), and so on—were purchased by the nuns. The emphasis was always on ‘suitable’—that is, usually excellent—sites, and the pupils were drawn from families of the emerging wealthy middle class (gente acomodada) or the aristocracy. These classes also provided the young women who became the teachers (the choir nuns) for the Society. The poor were not forgotten; in accordance with the wishes of the foundress, poor schools were opened in association with each new foundation. Indeed, at the time of the Spanish centenary in 1946, the number of girls who had received instruction in the free schools surpassed that of the fee-paying pupils. In one year (1906) this was as much as two and a half times as great (3346 compared with 1290). The quality of the education in the two kinds of school was, however, very different and the Society’s reputation rested on its elite schools.

María Victoria (MariVí) Muñoz remembered one of the nuns who was a product of this time, a woman who had held the office of Provincial for many years, as a person who intimidated you. She gave you the impression that she carried a poster that said, ‘Noli me tangere [Don’t touch me].’ She kept her distance, but this was something that wasn’t only a product of her training in the Sacred Heart as student and as religious, but also came from her aristocratic background. She was a great lady [una gran Señora] from her head to her toes.

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8 Religiosas Del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (1946: 27).
9 According to Susanna de Vries, Daisy Bates was a daygirl at the Order’s poor school in Roscrea, Ireland. De Vries (2008) suggests that this is where she observed the behaviour and manners of the boarding pupils, over the wall and on occasional days when the two schools came together, and that this stood her in good stead when she first arrived in Australia.
10 The Latin Vulgate translation of the reported words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the garden after the Resurrection (John 20: 17).
Ana María Argaya, who had spent many years living the traditional religious life before overseeing the changes as part of the central governing body of the Society, made the point that one of the key changes had been that the nuns had moved from being ‘les grandes dames du Sacré Cœur’ (the great ladies of the Sacred Heart) to being just anyone (unas cualesquiera). Marta de Vera, living in one of the more radical piso communities, commented that she could not understand why, since the changes, young women continued to enter the convent: ‘For us it was part of the social environment…If I had to do it now, perhaps I wouldn’t.’

Even within the general traditionalism and conservatism of the Society of the Sacred Heart internationally, the Spanish convents represented an extreme. Socorro Abel had entered the convent in France when she was thirty years old. She described her surprise on her return to Spain in 1962:

I spent my novitiate and first years in France, and for me the change from the French religious life to the Spanish religious life was very great. Very great. For example, since I’d entered, I’d had a small professional autonomy within my own domain. No-one had told me how I ought to organise things in my professional work. And I’d never been disconnected from newspapers in France. In the novitiate on Sundays, we could read press cuttings; we couldn’t read the whole newspaper because that was forbidden by Canon Law. But they did provide clippings that dealt with real situations, with political and social problems. And in France I was given a Bible; in Spain novices were not allowed to read the Bible. They were allowed to have the New Testament, but were not allowed to read the Old Testament. There wasn’t even a Bible if you went looking for one!...And I’d read books of philosophy, even as a novice, that it wouldn’t have occurred to anyone in Spain to read.

Background: Early twentieth-century Spain

This contrast between a conservative Spain and a more liberal France was not confined to the nuns. Spain had flirted with modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but those forays had been sporadic and had stalled. The years 1923 to 1930 had seen the return of dictatorship under General Miguel Primo de Rivera. The dictatorship had had the support of the Bourbon King, Alfonso XIII. Even with the subsequent abdication of Alfonso XIII in 1931, the old order prevailed. Its characteristics had been ‘monarchist, centralist,
Catholic, imbued with the values of empire and arms, and run by and largely for the social and economic elites’. The declaration of the Second Republic promised a new order, and not merely a political system without a king. The Republic meant, for those who cheered its arrival, a democratic, civilian, secular order, in which the centre would have to be responsive to the periphery, and the top to the bottom. For those who were sceptical or hostile, it meant the abandonment of tradition, and a threat to stability, property and national unity.

Moreover:

No one expected the Republic to continue the church–state alliance that had existed between Catholicism and the crown. The separation of church and state and the introduction of religious freedom were inevitable concomitants of the historic turn to Republicanism. Many of the bishops feared something worse, namely an active attempt to secularise Spanish society and culture, and to limit the freedom of action of the church.

On the agenda of the Republic, too, were social and economic reforms, including the urgent issue of land reform, jobs, better working conditions, better education. This was in addition to attempting to curb the power of the church and the military. This democratic experiment lasted only five years, however, until the outbreak of civil war in July 1936, and suffered an even more bloody failure than the Thai ‘democratic experiment’ 40 years later.

There were three elections during this period: June 1931, November 1933 and February 1936. All the governments formed as a result of these elections were unstable coalitions. In 1931 and 1936, the largest number of seats was won by the Socialists (Partido Socialista Obrero Español or PSOE), but the party was not able to govern in its own right at any time. In view of the blanket term of los Rojos (the Reds) applied to them and to other left-wing groups by their opponents, then and later, it is notable that the Communist Party won only one seat in one of the elections, that of 1933, although it did join the alliance of parties led by the Socialists that formed the Popular Front and won the 1936 election. The two years following the 1933 elections came to be known as the Bienio Negro (the Black Period). The ambitious programs of the first Republican government had had only limited success. They were replaced by a right-wing...
coalition. Sporadic violence and growing unrest among both industrial and agricultural workers culminated in a revolt by Asturian miners in October 1934. In the subsequent pacification and repression, around 1000 workers were killed and thousands of political prisoners taken. The elections of February 1936 were a last desperate attempt to save the Republic, but civil war was by then inevitable. Another brief eruption of modernity was once more stifled by the Civil War (1936–39) and the first repressive decades of *el Franquismo* (1939–75).

Together with the Anarchists, the Socialists and other Republicans, the Communists played a major part in the Civil War. With the exception of some of the nuns in Catalonia and the Basque Country, most of the nuns and their families identified with the Catholic right during the Second Republic and saw the Nationalist uprising against the government of the Republic as a godly crusade against *los Rojos* (the Reds). They were drawn into this political maelstrom by two main and historically related associations. One was the battle over the control of education. The other was the identification of the Society with the symbol of the Sacred Heart.

**Relationship of the nuns to Spanish political history**

Until 1913, the struggle for the control of education had largely taken the indirect form of an attempt by the state to limit the development of religious orders. This attempt was vigorously, and mostly successfully, resisted by the Church. The success of the Church’s resistance is reflected in the fact that this period had also seen the Society of the Sacred Heart more than double its schools, from nine in 1898 to 19 and a teachers’ college by 1930. Moreover, the Church did not hesitate to invoke an extreme discourse that pitted secular against divine authority. To take just one of a myriad examples, against a proposed law in 1910 limiting religious associations, and by implication their involvement in education (the *Ley del Candado*), the hierarchy declared unequivocally in a public letter of protest to the King that the implementation of the law would imply mortal sin and excommunication.

After the abdication of Alfonso XIII and the declaration of the Republic in 1931, the legislation of 1931–33 no longer approached the problem of the Church indirectly, but confronted head-on the question of control of education. The Constitution of 1931 contained a contentious provision, Article 26, which specifically prohibited religious orders from teaching. Nevertheless, the

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15 ibid., pp. 21–2.
prohibition was not instantly enforced, since the Government was not in an immediate position to replace the religious schools. These were granted a reprieve until the Law of Confessions and Religious Congregations of 1933, which, among other things, included an absolute, if ineffectual, prohibition of teaching by religious personnel. These laws, and the atmosphere of crisis in the Church that they provoked, finally dragged the nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart into critical involvement with the political and social events from which they had previously stood back. These were the events that deeply affected the lives of the women of the Civil War generation and their work in the schools.

The most dramatic of these events took place on the fateful 11 May 1931, when the buildings at Chamartin—not only the school and the house of novitiate but also the provincial house—were among the convents burnt by mobs in an upsurge of anticlerical and antimonarchical violence. Eleven other buildings in Madrid were burnt on the same day. In the following days, the burnings spread to other parts of Spain: Valencia, Alicante, Murcia, Seville, Cadiz and especially Malaga. The headquarters of the monarchist newspaper ABC were also burnt. Despite the ferocity, no-one died in the attacks. With the burning of Chamartin went the provincial archives, so that written information from the period before the end of the Civil War is sketchy, but a number of the nuns remember it, in broad description and accidental detail.

The burning of Chamartin took place at about six in the evening. María Ángeles Martín-Barreda was there:

I was in the novitiate, and on the 11th of May 1931, they came to burn Chamartin. We all had to leave. Mother Modet, the Provincial, and some of the novices—probably about 30—went to the house of the Countess… But she couldn’t take so many; without postulants, we were sixty. That night, I went to three different houses. In two, they refused me. In the end I went to the house of a relative. But there were some funny details. Those who’ d got fat [in the novitiate] couldn’t fit into their clothes. As for me, I’d always been fat, so they were all asking me for clothes.

Josefina Rodríguez remembered other details: ‘The afternoon of the fire, the Provincial sent the novices to their families. The professed nuns she told to go to the houses of the poor. But not one poor family would let them in.’

17 Garcia Villoslada (1979: 348).
18 Thomas (1977: 58–9).
19 The first stage of training after entering the convent was that of postulant. It normally lasted about six months, and postulants did not wear the religious habit. Novices did wear the habit, but with a white rather than a black veil.
20 ‘The professed’ are those who have completed their training, taken their final vows and are full members of the Society of the Sacred Heart.
During the sacking of Chamartin, the statue of the Sacred Heart in the central courtyard was attacked and its right arm smashed. This was an early and lesser version of one of the most famous symbolic events at the beginning of the Civil War: the ritual execution by a Republican militia firing squad of the statue of the Sacred Heart at the Cerro de los Ángeles (the Hill of the Angels). In 1919, Spain had been officially consecrated to the Sacred Heart at this site by Alfonso XIII in a ceremony with clear political implications. The following eyewitness account of the event was given in her memoirs by the dissident and Republican Constancia de la Mora:21

Later on in that spring of 1919 I went to another Spanish ceremony, this time with my grandfather, [Antonio Maura], then Prime Minister, and our entire family. King Alfonso was to dedicate a statue of the Sacred Heart—the occasion was so important that my grandmother appeared in public beside her husband for one of the few times of her life. We all motored to the Cerro de los Ángeles where stonemasons had erected the statue in the exact geographical centre of Spain near Madrid. My grandfather made a short speech and then King Alfonso, standing beside him, stepped forward and in his weak voice offered his country to the image of the Sacred Heart...

The grave-faced noblemen, the Grandees, and all the other titles and their resplendent wives nodded solemnly as they heard the King of Spain pledge his subjects to the Church and the monarchy. The King lifted his hand to pull the veil covering the statue. The great crowd watching him stirred restlessly. Workmen bustled forward to assist. The fluttering white cover slipped off the stone to disclose the graven words: ‘You will reign in Spain’.

And then the crowd went mad with cheers. And the King and my grandfather and all the noblemen turned pale. For under the huge carved words was another slogan, roughly and hastily scratched on. In Spanish not nearly so elegant as the ‘You will reign in Spain’, were the words: ‘You may think so, but it will not be true’.

Indeed, when the battlelines were irrevocably drawn during the Civil War, there was no doubt in people’s minds as to whose side the Sacred Heart belonged; the symbol became reality. The destruction of the statue after the outbreak of war in July 1936 was a statement of fierce intent to fulfil that warning at the time of its dedication. It took several days, from 28 July until 7 August, to complete the destruction. The militia tried twice to dynamite the statue and then to topple it with the help of a tractor. They finally smashed it by hand with

21 de la Mora (1940: 32–4).
hammers. But the most memorable, and most remembered, of these events was the first: the shooting of the statue by a firing squad on 28 July.\(^{22}\) So potent was this act of symbolic as well as actual destruction that the Franco government undertook the restoration of the sanctuary in the early years of their victory. In 1942, with the country still devastated by the effects of the Civil War, the Government made an appeal to the nation to transfigure the site, ‘in view of the satanic attempt to convert the Cerro de los Ángeles—Hill of the Angels—into the Cerro de los Rojos: Hill of the Reds’. Instead it was to become ‘another Mount Tabor, where the glory of Christ will appear in all the splendour of His Divine Presence, where His chosen disciples, the sons and daughters of Catholic Spain, will find light and strength, blessedness and peace, justice and charity’.\(^{23}\)

The attack on the statue of the Sacred Heart in Chamartín, as well as on the convent and the school, must be read, therefore, as part of a wider battle over the symbols as well as the politics of the struggle between the new order represented by the Republic and the old order, ultimately led by Franco and the Nationalist rebels. There were of course other symbols. One was the flag. Within a fortnight of the abdication of Alfonso XIII, the new provisional government issued a decree announcing a new national flag and changing the tri-band red-yellow-red to the tricolour red-yellow-purple:

> The national uprising against tyranny, victorious since 14 April, has raised a sign invested by the understanding of the people with a double meaning: that of the hope of liberty and of its irrevocable triumph...A new era begins in Spanish life...The Republic protects all. So does the flag, which signifies peace, and the participation of all citizens under a regime of just laws. It signifies even more: the fact, new in the history of Spain, that the action of the State has no other motive than the interest of the country, nor any other basis than respect for conscience, liberty, and work.\(^{24}\)

The old flag was made illegal. This caused severe problems for Dolores Suárez, who was eighteen and had not yet joined the Society of the Sacred Heart when the Second Republic was declared:

> They detained me, along with my brother and sister. We had a lamp—it was just an ornament—but the shade was crocheted in red and yellow thread. Because the Republic had declared the tricolour [illegal], they took me away. They took me first to the Security Department, and later to a convent near the Plaza de España that they had taken over to detain

\(^{22}\) Anibarro Espeso (1975: 44–54).
\(^{23}\) ibid., p. 131.
\(^{24}\) Decree of 27 April 1931.
people. It was very overcrowded with about 1400 people in the convent.
I was there for three months. During the night, for about 12 hours, we
didn’t even have toilets.

For others, the possession of the old flag was a more intentional symbol of
resistance. María Angustias de Heredia recalled the triumphant entry of
Nationalist troops into Madrid on 28 March 1939:

We had a maid at home, Antonia, and when the Republic arrived she
went silly. She took off her uniform and left her hair loose. We couldn’t
do anything; though she did remain loyal. But when Franco arrived in
Madrid, my mother had sewn a big flag—and the day that he arrived,
she put it out on the balcony (the apartment was near Cibeles)—saying
And you, Antonia, now you will go and tidy yourself and serve at table
as God ordained.’

Many others in the Society of the Sacred Heart also welcomed the Nationalist
victory and the possibility of a return to the ordered way of life that they had
known before. The position of the nuns during the Second Republic is intimated
in some of the few documents that survived the loss of the provincial archives
in the burning of Chamartin in 1931. They are revealingly filed under the title
‘Documents related to the Religious Persecution, 1931–36’. A number of these
deal with the Congregation’s association with Sociedad Anónima de Ensenañza
Libre (SADEL: Limited Company for Freedom of Teaching), an organisation
set up in 1933 under the auspices of the Catholic Association of Parents.25 By
transferring ownership of school properties to SADEL, the nuns were able to
remain within the law and, at the same time, continue teaching. With these
arrangements, the schools—by now numbering 17—on the whole continued to
function, usually with the help of former students. By changing their title to
Academia, doing away with a uniform for the students, and themselves dressing
in secular clothes, a fairly normal routine was established. After her experience
of seeking shelter outside Chamartin on the night it was burnt, María Ángeles
Martín-Barreda was sent, with the rest of the novices, to Avigliana, in Italy:

I returned to Spain in February 1933. That school year was normal, with
the habit and everything, up till the end of the year. At the end of 1933
and the beginning of 1934, they founded SADEL…Under SADEL, they
divided the house into two: the convent, that belonged to us, where
we wore the habit and gave classes in religion and needlework; and
the SADEL, where we wore secular clothes. We were employed by the
SADEL, and only those who had qualifications [título] could teach. In

25 Report in ABC, 4 July 1933.
the last months before the war, we used to go out every night with the children to sleep in houses outside [del pueblo]. And look at the providence of God. The war broke out on the 17th July. The children had already gone on holidays. And there had been some teachers from the country who had come to make a retreat. They left on the last bus that left Madrid. After that it wouldn’t have been possible to have returned to the villages.

Josefina Rodríguez had spent this time in Seville: ‘In Seville, we had a secret door. We used to go through it into the school at eight in the morning. In the afternoon, we went back to the convent.’ Even in the case of Chamartin, the school was reopened in the ruins within three months.

This dual existence lasted for the nuns until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936. The war meant the closing of schools in Republican zones and the dispersal of communities. Some of the nuns, a group of 41, were detained or imprisoned for varying periods of up to several months, but none was executed. Josefina Rodríguez did not see this as something to be celebrated: ‘We were one of the few religious orders without martyrs. We weren’t worthy.’ Josefina was not one of the 41 who had been detained or imprisoned; they were older and more senior nuns and are no longer alive. Others managed to reach Nationalist areas, or got to France or to Italy, though many lost fathers and brothers. The deserted convents were used in a number of different capacities: as hospitals, childcare centres, military barracks. The former ducal palace at Leganitos was in the front line of the siege in Madrid, and was virtually destroyed. Convents in the Nationalist zones rallied to the war effort, helped look after the wounded and opened their doors to religious from Republican areas.

With the Nationalist victory in 1939, the Society’s schools were very quickly reopened, in a spirit expressed two decades later on the centenary of the founding of Chamartin: ‘On Wednesday, 29 March 1939, Year of the Victory, was liberated Madrid, last bulwark of Marxism. And on 5 April, Chamartin renewed the thread of its history after three years of slavery beneath the powers of darkness. The imprint left by the enemy was apocalyptic, an infernal chaos.’

In contrast with ‘the imprint left by the enemy’, the imprint left by the Franco years was a consolidation and growth of the work of the Society of the Sacred Heart. While much of the rest of the country suffered under the harsh repression of the regime, the Society opened 12 new schools or residences between 1939 and 1969, all with the same basic religious, political, social and educational orientations as before. Chamartin was rebuilt around the statue of the Sacred Heart that had survived the fire and the war with the loss of only its arm; and

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26 *Mater Admirabilis* (Chamartin 1959b: 20).
the school of St Dionysius was reopened on a new site. At the centenary of Chamartin in 1959, one of the principal speakers was the former propagandist and Minister for Foreign Affairs Alberto Martín Artajo, who, even though he had fallen into personal disfavour with Franco, was still publicly identified with the regime. His sister Carmen had been a nun in the Society, and his wife, his six sisters and his daughters were all educated in Sacred Heart schools. At the same centenary celebrations, the Civil Order of Social Welfare (Beneficencia), the Cross of the First Class, was presented to the school by the Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Works, Antonio María Oriol. And students of the three schools in Madrid and some others made a pilgrimage of ‘reparation’ (desagravio) to the statue of the Sacred Heart at the Cerro de los Ángeles.

There were a few exceptions among the nuns to the general adulation of Franco and his zealous reappropriation of Christian rhetoric and symbols. Marta Echave and Ana Garay came from separatist Basque families whose families were made to suffer bitterly after the war. Ángeles Álvarez’s father was a captain in the army who was in Ciudad Real at the time of Franco’s rebellion. Although sympathetic to the rebels’ objectives, he regarded his oath of loyalty to the legally constituted government to be binding even when he did not agree with all its policies. He therefore fought on the Republican side in the Civil War. At the end of the war, he was imprisoned, tried by court martial and dismissed from the army. He lived in poverty and disgrace until an official reinstatement, sought by his family, in 1983. His daughter, like Marta Echave and Ana Garay, kept silent in her community.

The Church’s modernising moment: The impact of Vatican II

The first ripples of change began in 1962. In February, the Franco regime initiated a program for modernisation with its first ‘plan of economic and social development’. Two months earlier, on 25 December 1961, Pope John XXIII had announced the convocation of the Second Vatican Council—Vatican II—in order for the Catholic Church to engage with ‘the modern world’. For the nuns, Vatican II (1962–65) was the pivotal event that first provoked and then mediated their own experience of modernity. At the same time, even in these religious matters, the different generational responses were fundamentally shaped by the Civil War.
Ana María Argaya, who was in Rome as a member of the order’s governing body during Vatican II, commented: ‘I was at the heart of the change, and I have to say that the changes came solely from the Council. Solely. There was no internal fuss...We knew that the young people felt very repressed...But the change came from obedience to the Council.’

This view was widely shared. MariVí Muñoz was in Rome from September 1966 to February 1967 for her period of Probation, the final stage for the nuns before they took their final vows. A decade later, she was deeply committed to the liberation theology that had emerged from Latin America. But she remembered this earlier time:

In Probation, everything was very peaceful. I remember, and this is very funny: the Mother General called us together and told us that she was going to give us as the name of our Probation ‘Unity in love’, because in a moment when the Society was so divided—and I, I said to the person next to me, ‘Why is it divided?’ It’s just—we had no idea of, of—as we used to be in Spain, so closed. The generations of Spaniards really, like champions of the faith, we knew nothing about trends, nothing about the Council, nothing at all. At least, we knew that there’d been a Council, certainly, but as for the documents, they’d come, but as there was no enthusiasm for anything new, well, we read them like a pious document and not like something that was going to change our lives.

Socorro Abel, a handsome woman in her fifties who lived in one of the small piso communities, made very clear that:

Before the changes, the truth is that I, personally, never felt any need to change. That’s to say that I’ve changed because others have pushed me. At least, they haven’t pushed me, but it was others who had the idea, they were the pioneers and saw the changes that had to be made. When I saw them taking that step, how much that opened my eyes! And I said to myself that I also had to change. But I didn’t initiate it.

This was the woman who had entered the order in France but had not felt ‘uncomfortable’ previously. Nevertheless:

I changed from the religious habit at the beginning of the Seventies. As part of a course, I went three years running to Valladolid for the film festival. The first year, we all wore the habit; there were about 10 nuns. But to go to theatres in the city to see films, like Isadora Duncan, in the habit! We all agreed that we’d change it for the second year. Afterwards, in Madrid, where I was teaching in the school, I wore the habit to give classes, and then afterwards, straight away, I’d have to change it—everything, right down to underclothes—to go out. And trying to do
something normal with your hair after it had been covered for a week! I didn’t know in which situation I was in disguise [disfrazada], in the habit or in secular dress.

When she did change from the religious habit, the first gift that her family gave her were earrings: ‘part of women’s clothing here, a custom’.

The radical nature of these changes for the nuns can only be measured by reminding ourselves about what had gone before. The reluctance to alternate between the habit and secular clothes in 1970 had a very different source from that for the nuns during the Republic. Now the change signified a dramatic shift in orientation arising from Vatican II, as the nuns grappled with the notion that their religious life was not principally about their own good, but about ‘insertion’ in the world. Having guided the Society through the first years of change, Ana María Argaya identified the key as involvement [la inserción]; to choose and to want to live among men, in solidarity with them, living a normal life with people…The question of the habit relates to this involvement…The habit was a sign of separation from the world, indeed as a consecration to God, but a sign of separation from the world. Now we no longer want that separation from the world—the world in the sense used by Jesus: ‘You shall not be of the world. You shall be in the world but not of the world’…If we’re more involved, and want to be more involved, if we’re going to go out into our neighbourhoods [los barrios], we have to wear normal clothes like everyone else.

The Society’s response

At first, the changes were gradual and took place in three main stages, each dependent upon a General Chapter of the Society of the Sacred Heart. The General Chapter is the principal official decision-making body for the Society and is held in accordance with the requirements of Canon Law that all recognised religious orders send representatives every six years to a general meeting. The General Chapters were held at the Society’s central house in Rome.

The first of these was the regular six-yearly Chapter of 1964, and coincided with the Vatican Council itself. Having thrown open the windows of the Church, Pope John XXIII had died in June of the previous year and been succeeded by Paul VI. The work of the Council was not yet complete, and most of its documents had still to be finalised. But John XXIII had prepared a document for the opening of the Council that was issued in its first session. This was a Message to Humanity, and it set the tone and direction for what followed, both in the Church and for
the nuns. For the Society, this was first reflected in the General Chapter of 1964. For the first time, some of what had seemed like immutable principles were questioned. Among these was the rule of enclosure which, along with the habit, had enforced the ideal of separation from the world. The representatives at the General Chapter made the bold decision that enclosure was to be suppressed. In order for this to be implemented, however, the nuns needed clarification of the canonical status of the vow of stability. Inquiries to the Sacred Congregation of Religious produced the surprising result that the vow of stability had no canonical foundation whatsoever for religious orders of the active life—those involved, for example, in teaching or nursing—and therefore no binding power at all. Instead of the major opposition that the nuns had feared, there was no official objection to the suppression of enclosure.

The formal suppression, however, did not have an immediate impact. It was left to the discretion of individual Provincials to implement it as they saw fit—and many did not see fit. Carmen Vega, who was a young nun in 1964, remembered ‘Aurora [a former Provincial] told us that the great Chapter for change was 1964, even more than 1967...But the Provincials returned silent, silent [calladas, calladas]. Here, we knew nothing of all this.’

Socorro Abel added:

But Aurora also told us about the situation when the Mexican Provincial was killed in a car accident just as she returned from Rome. Aurora was named as the new Provincial. She received a letter from [the Superior General] setting out what had been decided at the Chapter. Point one: we no longer have enclosure. Point two: but do not give too much importance to that, so that we do not lose the spirit of enclosure. Aurora’s response was, how can we have the spirit of something that no longer exists?

Despite this general downplaying of the importance of the change, for some it had instant effect. Concha Jiménez was in Brazil:

Because of enclosure, the nuns couldn’t go to the shantytowns [las fávolas]. If there was a problem, they’d send one of the students, or one of the alumnae. When the Provincial came back from the Chapter of 1964, at seven o’clock in the evening she gave the news of the end of enclosure at seven in the evening. At 7.30 the nuns were in the shantytowns with the children.

The question of enclosure was closely related to another central theme of the 1964 Chapter—that of a specific commitment by the Society to the poor. This was qualitatively different from the practice of operating poor schools in conjunction with fee-paying schools that had been the custom up to that time. It
was the Chapter of 1964, in fact, that directed the closure of those poor schools that still existed, as they did in Spain, on the grounds that such separation only served to perpetuate an unjust system based on inequality. Over the following years, all the poor schools were closed, and their students incorporated into the main schools, which adjusted their fee-paying systems accordingly.

Like Ana María Argaya, though in slightly different words, Rosario León, one of the older nuns who later became Provincial, identified the ending of enclosure and the commitment to the poor as the most important changes in bringing about the nuns’ involvement with the world: ‘It’s one thing to know that there are poor people. It’s another thing actually to see them.’

The 1964 Chapter, then, laid the foundations for the nuns to put into practice the connection between a good life, as focused on the pursuit of their own perfection, and a good society. The commitment to the poor was phrased in terms no longer of charity but of social justice. This impetus flowed into the deliberations of the extraordinary General Chapter of 1967, which, in the light of the full documentation of Vatican II, produced a definitive text for the Society. This was the Orientaciones ad experimentum, officially initiating three years of experimentation. It was in two main aspects—an emphasis on community and a commitment to education for social justice—that the Orientaciones envisaged the most profound change in the Society’s direction.

The process culminated for the Society as a whole in the General Chapter of 1970. It was the 1970 Chapter that brought the nuns comprehensively into the world. Thirteen years later, Rosario León commented on the outcome of the Chapter:

It continues to be the most studied, the most read, the most loved by us...It was when, in reality, we throbbed, we lived [the reality of the changes], with a great hope for community, a great hope to form small groups. The great changes—in life itself—have their roots in the Chapter of 1970.

As this comment suggests, the period after 1970 was one of energy, of rupture, of passionate commitment but also of resistance to change, and of conflict and confrontation. It was Rosario León who, when she was made Provincial in 1971 after spending a year working in Galicia, encouraged and facilitated the moves away from the traditional communities into pisos and alternative community work. When Ana María Argaya returned to Spain in the summer of 1971 after several years at the Society’s central house in Rome and having presided over the 1970 Chapter, she was ‘astounded. I saw such changes, in the way of living, of acting, of dressing—of everything; such very, very great changes that I was shocked’.
The new order: Modernisation for the Society and for Spain

The three years of ‘experimentation’ coincided with a period of significant social change in Spain itself. This was the time when public opposition to the Franco regime was beginning to gather strength. As the nuns moved out to encounter the world, what they found was a society based on repression and inequality, with extensive poverty and underdevelopment. These were the conditions that the government technocrats were attempting to address in their ‘plan of economic and social development’, designed to cover the period 1964–67. There followed a period of planned economic change and unplanned social stirrings brought about by the burgeoning of an ‘economic miracle’. Some Spaniards began to enjoy prosperity after two decades of privation and repression. Others found their lives disrupted. There was a restructuring of industry and, for the first time, industrialisation was undertaken on a broad national base. This was accompanied by a process of economic modernisation.

The result was that Spain’s economic base changed from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial one. By 1965, the factory was overtaking the farm as the leading employer of labour. Accompanying this change was a flight from the land. Between 1960 and 1975, five million people left the land for the industrial towns and the tourist regions.

At the same time, Franco maintained strong central control and continued to suppress opposition and any moves to regional autonomy. The Civil War had been followed by widespread executions; an unknown number of Republican prisoners had died in constructing such monuments as the massive stone cross and monastery and the underground basilica of the Valley of the Fallen (Valle de los Caídos). But the regime was attempting to improve its international image and standing. The effort was without consistency. While tourism was becoming a serious industry, in 1962 the Communist Julián Grimau García was arrested and tortured. In 1963, despite international outrage, he was executed by firing squad. A few months later, two young anarchists were also tortured and executed, this time by the garrotte vil, an iron collar that slowly strangled them to death. Repression continued in Catalonia and the Basque provinces, with the use of both languages forbidden. The year 1959 marked the birth of the violent resistance movement Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna (ETA: Basque Homeland and Freedom). Even Franco’s home province of Galicia was denied any special recognition.

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33 Lieberman (1982: 7–8).
34 Harrison (1978: 150).
35 de Blaye (1976: 216–21).
36 ibid., p. 250.
For many of the nuns, what some referred to as their religious awakening was the very instrument of their political awakening. It was indeed the growing realisation of the political aspects of their commitment to social justice that marks perhaps the strongest difference between the women of the post–Civil War generation and many of the older nuns. Bourdieu suggests that central to the question of generational differences are different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable:37

Generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by...conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa.

For the older nuns, their experience of religious life, and of what they understood as a good life, had been forged in the deep traditions of the Church and the Society of the Sacred Heart and in the context of the Second Republic and the Civil War. The experience of the younger women of the traditional forms of religious life was direct and significant, but not as formative as that of the older nuns, and their knowledge of those critical historical events was at a distance. Their different definitions of the natural or reasonable were reflected in their different initial responses to the unthinkable, to what had seemed the impossibility of change, and to a very different concept of a good life and of a good society.

For a group of the older nuns, their first venture after the ending of enclosure was to the Cerro de los Ángeles. For many of the younger nuns, there began a questioning about aspects of what they had previously taken for granted. But habitus is not wholly definitive and the distinctions are not absolute. The questioning by the younger nuns opened the issues for some of the older nuns. For Rosario León, herself one of the Civil War generation, this kind of openness was a welcome novelty:

That was when we began to criticise the hierarchy. I remember the first feeling, the first time—I still remember it—when I heard a serious criticism of the hierarchy. It was just—I’d never heard a criticism. Listen [whispering], I was forty-five years old, and I’d never heard a criticism of anything. And the first time that I saw, in a perfectly quiet way, a perfectly calm way, a criticism, based on the gospel, of the power of the Church, it was—I don’t know...

Concha Varela had an equally embarrassing recollection:

37 Bourdieu (1979: 78).
Do you know what I did, my first year at university? I confused Luther with St Ignatius! I had the idea that Luther was such a monster, such a villain [un bicho tan malo], that when I read his text and commentaries, and they showed a man who was so intelligent, I said to myself that it had to be St Ignatius!

At a more material level, one of the questions asked as part of the new openness was about the geographical locations of the Society’s schools: whether this aspect was, of itself, a denial of real commitment to the poor. Many struggled to reconcile a personal commitment to poverty with a life lived in enormous and often beautiful buildings, which ensured that they lacked for no material things. Many became acutely aware of the discrepancy between the siting of their schools and convents in affluent and predominantly urban areas when the critical social problems of the country were socially and geographically elsewhere.

From dictatorship to democracy

In many ways, the personal histories of the nuns, especially of those of the post–Civil War generation, are part of a broader movement in which parts of the Spanish Church also became radicalised. A lead was taken in 1958–59 by two workers’ organisations that were also Catholic Action groups: the Workers’ Brotherhood of Catholic Action (Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica, HOAC) and the Young Catholic Workers (Juventud Obrera Católica, JOC). HOAC provided the necessary shelter from which the far more radical—and illegal—Workers’ Commissions were to emerge. In May 1960, a group of 339 priests from the Basque provinces and Navarre wrote a joint letter to their bishops denouncing police brutality and the complicity of the Church with the state. Dom Aureli Escarré, the ‘red’ Abbot of Montserrat, was forced into exile in 1965 as a result of his outspokenness against the repressiveness of the regime.38 In Barcelona in May 1966, 130 priests and religious marched in silent protest against police maltreatment of a student.39 The Bishop of Bilbao, Antonio Añoveros, consistently opposed the regime over its repressive policies towards the Basques. In retaliation, he was placed under house arrest in 1974 and an attempt was made to force him to leave the country.40 This criticism of the regime was far from universal throughout the Spanish Church, but it was supported by the publication in 1961 of John XXIII’s encyclical Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress). The encyclical prefigured many of the issues dealt with by

39 Fundación FOESSA (1976: 536).
Vatican II and were taken up in the Council documents. They covered matters such as a just wage, balancing economic development and social progress, the demands of the common good, taxation, credit banks, and social responsibility.

Opposition to the regime came increasingly also, not just from pockets within the Church, but more broadly from across the country. The years between 1969, when Franco finally announced Prince Juan Carlos to be his successor as Head of State, and the death of el Caudillo (the Leader) at the end of 1975, were marked by strikes, demonstrations, arrests and banishments. The year 1970 began with strikes by 14,000 Asturian miners, 10,000 agricultural workers in the province of Jerez, 2600 shipyard workers in Cadiz, 3000 Basque metal workers, and 500 public transport workers in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. Some 817 strikes were officially recorded over the whole of 1970, despite strikes being illegal and strikers liable to prison sentences. Among these strikes was the first national day of action, called by the Workers’ Commissions and involving a large number of workers—between 25,000 (the official estimate) and 50,000 (the commissions’ estimate)—in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Madrid, Seville and Galicia. 1970 was also the year of the Burgos trial: the trial of 16 Basque activists, including two priests, which unfolded as a trial of the regime. In December 1973, a few days before Christmas, ETA carried out one of its most spectacular assassinations, that of the Prime Minister, Admiral Carrero Blanco. His car was blown up, as he returned from daily mass, by explosives buried beneath the Calle Claudio Coello. The force of the blast blew the car over the roof of the Jesuits’ house on to a second-floor terrace in the next street. The explosion left a crater measuring 4 by 10 m. In April 1974, the Portuguese dictatorship came to an end through peaceful revolution involving young military officers, an event that sent shock waves through the Spanish right.

Predictably, these events provoked a hardening of attitude by both the Government and the military. Other right-wing groups took fright, including the Falangists—the Spanish fascist party formed by José Antonio de Rivera in 1933—and those surrounding Franco’s wife, Doña Carmen Polo y Martínez Valdés. As Franco became increasingly frail and ill, there was much manoeuvring to entrench a hardline succession. This included an expectation that King Juan Carlos would cede effective power to the last Franco prime minister, Carlos Arias Navarro, and his cabinet. Arias’s nickname from the Civil War was ‘the Butcher of Malaga’. Having stood in the shadow of Franco since he was a boy of eleven, the new King commanded some popularity but little respect. Santiago Carrillo,
leader of the Spanish Communist Party, dubbed him ‘Juan Carlos the Brief’, a nickname that Carrillo himself was the first to reject in a remarkable speech recognising the King’s crucial subsequent role in overseeing the transition from dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy and to democracy.47

The transition was far from smooth. Juan Carlos inherited a distrustful and distrusted prime minister. It was not until July 1976 that Arias finally resigned and the King was able to appoint his own choice for prime minister, Adolfo Suárez González. Although their partnership faced its own difficulties, the two men together steered the reforms necessary to achieve democracy. This included legislation in 1976 for the legalisation of political parties, with the initial exception of the Communist Party. Legalisation of the Communist Party came about in April 1977, when the Supreme Court ruled that there was nothing to prevent the inclusion of the Communist Party in the Register of Political Associations, causing outrage on the right. The year 1977 also saw the emergence of an allegedly Marxist-Leninist splinter group, Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre (GRAPO: Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups of the First of October), who engaged in violent acts of bombing and kidnapping. In January, right-wing groups murdered five people, four of whom were Communist labour lawyers, in an office of the Atocha district of Madrid. One of the murdered men was a cousin of a teacher at Chamartin.

On the same day as the Atocha massacre, a number of senior military officers met in Madrid to call for the resignation of the Government.48 This meeting was just one of a number of attempts by the military over this second democratic experiment—el golpismo, the ongoing threat of a coup—to reinstall el Franquismo. Despite this very real and continuing threat, the first democratic elections were held in June 1977. Some 80 per cent of registered voters turned out to vote. The highest percentage went to Suárez’s party, the Unión de Centro Democrática (UCD), and the next highest to the Socialist Party, the PSOE, under its leader, Felipe González. The Communist Party received 9.3 per cent of the vote.

In 1978, the Constitution drafted by the elected Cortes included Article 1(3), which stated that ‘the political form of the Spanish State is a parliamentary democracy’. This reflected not just the view of the parliamentarians but also the direct commitment of King Juan Carlos to the consolidation of democracy.49 The Constitution was ratified, first by the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and, on 6 December, by a constitutional referendum. The only significant exception to this popular ratification was the Basque Country. But there had

47 ibid., p. 416.
48 ibid., pp. 380, 384.
49 ibid., pp. 400, 416–17.
been another unsuccessful attempt by the military to derail this process. One of the key plotters was Colonel Antonio Tejero Molina of the Civil Guard in what became known as Operación Galaxia after the Madrid café where the plotters met.\(^5^0\) In March 1979, there were further general elections, in which Suárez’s UCD again achieved the highest number of votes. Two years later, however, Suárez resigned. The party elected Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo—grandson of José Calvo Sotelo, whose murder had been the immediate excuse for the Nationalist rebellion in 1936—to replace Suárez as leader of the party and prime minister. In an act of delicious irony, it was while the Cortes was considering the Calvo Sotelo nomination that Tejero staged his attempted coup, on 23 February.

The failure of the coup, the active intervention of the King and the subsequent massive demonstration of people in support of democracy reflected the continuing stain on Spanish memory of the bloodshed during and after the Civil War. I hold dear the image of those demonstrators, my introduction to Spain, walking through the Madrid rain on a cold winter’s night. An equally vivid image is one from 18 months later, on the eve of the general elections of 28 October. We went, along with thousands of others, to the rally in the grounds of the Complutense University of Madrid. Among other songs, Joan Manuel Serrat sang *Para la Libertad*—‘for freedom, I bleed, I fight, I survive’—one of the poems of Miguel Hernández, who died as a Republican prisoner in a Nationalist jail in 1942. Because most Spaniards had a cigarette lighter, the sports arena came alight with tens of thousands of flames as the audience joined in the singing. In the elections the next day, the Socialist Party won an overwhelming majority, with 47.26 of the vote. For the first time, Spain had a democratically elected Socialist government and Felipe González became Prime Minister, a position he and the PSOE held through the next 14 years and three elections. The third Spanish attempt at democracy was successful and the ghosts of the Civil War were finally laid to rest.\(^5^1\) Almost. With great honesty and generosity, Rosario León expressed the ambiguities of many of the nuns of her generation:

> I tell myself that I have to think with my head that socialism has to be a very good thing. But my own emotional character [*sensibilidad*] is of the old style. Sometimes, I can accept things with my head, but they don’t feel good emotionally. Even today there are those of us who have lived certain things, with fearful horror. They came looking for my father. They were looking for him to kill him. And my mother said to him, ‘Where you go, I will go’. That left us, poor things, moving from one place to another, one place to another, until the war ended.

Modernity, along with war, has its own costs.

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\(^5^0\) ibid., p. 423.

\(^5^1\) Tremlett (2007) nevertheless makes clear that, in Spain, as in Thailand, there remains unfinished business. His book focuses on the exhumation, begun in 2000, of bodies buried in unmarked mass graves during the Spanish Civil War and the associated *pacto del olvido* (the pact of forgetting).