

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRATIC CIVIL SOCIETY IN SPAIN

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Abstract

This article examines how the Catholic Church assisted the transition to democracy and consolidation of democratic civil society in Spain through a position of political neutrality. By abstaining from any active role in political parties, abandoning pretence of moral monopoly and embracing pluralism, it helped facilitate the establishment of civil society. Analytically, the path dependence mechanism, Huntington's theory of democratisation and the secularisation of religion theory are used to explain the how the Spanish Catholic Church helped establish the bases of civil society in democratic Spain.

Key words: Catholic Church, Spain, civic networks, democratic process, democratic transition, civil society

Introduction

This article examines how the Catholic Church assisted the transition to democracy and consolidation of democratic civil society in Spain through a position of political neutrality. By abstaining from any active role in political parties, abandoning pretence of moral monopoly and embracing pluralism, it helped bolster a democratic civil society.

The Catholic Church has played a vital role in the formation of civil society in Spain, through its network of social organisations and as an important actor in the transition to democracy. By remaining aloof from political contention in emergent parties, it facilitated the shift towards laicism in the new democracy. Catholic organizations, though primarily oriented towards worship, were also social vehicles that benefitted many. Independent from the state, the Catholic Church has contributed decisively to the organisation of civil society and is integral to the Spanish civic fabric.

This implies significant transformative effort to adapt to the new political and social circumstances that emerged in the transition from an authoritarian society – where the Church enjoyed religious exclusivity – to a democracy, where it competes with other creeds and values. The Church was an important enabler of the transition and continues to contribute significantly to civil society in Spain. Many of its organisations transferred out of the religious sphere and continue their civic activity today.

Theoretical frame

Religion and democratisation

In the framework outlined by Huntington, the Spanish transition to democracy represents a ‘second try’ at democratisation. Spain’s weak democracy during the Spanish Second Republic (1931-39) lacked an extensive middle class. Crushing political, economic, and social crises led Spain back into an authoritarian system after the Civil War (1936-1939). Second-try democratisation also occurred in countries such as Portugal, Greece, Korea and Poland (Huntington 1991).

Coinciding with what Philpott (2004) calls ‘the Catholic wave’ of countries that underwent democratisation around that time, the Spanish model followed an A-d-a-D pattern.¹ ‘D’ emerged in 1975 and became definitive with the Constitution of 1978. First among the precipitating factors was the lack of legitimacy of authoritarian systems, which led to broad acceptance of democratic values. Second, sustained economic growth since the early 1960s had substantially raised standards of living and education in Spain, and a large middle class was emerging. Third, surprising changes in Catholic doctrine and activities became manifest in the Second Vatican Council (1963-65). The Spanish Church shifted from defending the *status quo* to opposing authoritarianism and

defending social, economic, and political reform (Huntington 1991; Philpott 2004). Fourth, external actors changed their policies and the European Community sought to expand the number of Member States (Huntington 1991). Here, we will focus on the third factor: how changes in the Spanish Catholic Church gave very significant impulse to the transition, provided important organisations that would later integrate into democratic civil society, and abstained from political participation or creating any Christian democratic party.

The Second Vatican Council was very important in this process, as it created openings formally (flexibilization of the Church with corresponding influence on state institutions) and especially informally (flexibilization of customs and moral strictness). From a micro perspective, this was fundamental in the transition to democracy (Iglesias de Ussel 1998).

The new situation generated relational dynamics between the Spanish Church and the state that can be framed in what Stepan (2000) calls ‘twin tolerations’: a dual manifestation of tolerance that underpins liberal democracies. Accordingly, the state respects the rights of all religious bodies to practice and express their faith, and to participate in democratic processes. In turn, the Catholic Church renounces its claim to the special constitutional status and prerogatives it held during the authoritarian regime and accepts religious freedom, believers of different faiths, and non-believers (Stepan 2000; Philpott 2004).

Secularisation in Spain

Secularisation in Spain, as in other Western societies (Casanova 1994a; Bruce 2011, 2012), is very recent, vertiginous in pace (Pérez-Agote and Santiago 2008) and has affected Catholic associative institutions. The great speed and extent of social change, derived from social processes and changes in reference social values (WVS 2011), subjects the very concept of secularisation to ongoing revision (Tschannen 1992). Secularisation here refers to the process by which religion and its organising institution –the Catholic Church in this case– loses importance, influence, and control over consciences and beliefs (Pérez-Agote and Santiago 2008).

As a reference frame, secularisation theory adequately describes the associational transfer from the Catholic Church to civil society and the effect of functional differentiation on the religious subsystem. It explains how a historically dominant and transcendent religious system has become one subsystem among many in functionally differentiated modern societies (Dobbelaere 2008). Within this frame, it is important to highlight the transition and transformation of civic organisations affiliated with the Catholic Church prior to the transition to democracy. Today, such organisations have lost all ties to the Church or remain structurally or legally affiliated but very receptive to secular tendencies. This is another contribution of the Spanish Catholic Church towards a democratic civil society.

Spain clearly presents elements of what Peter Berger describes as secularisation: ‘the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. [This] affects all of cultural and ideological life and can be observed in the decline of religious themes in the arts, in philosophy, in literature [etc.]’ (Berger 1969).

However, secularisation in Spain is complex. In surveys, many Spaniards still identify themselves as Catholic and actively participate in distinctly Catholic ~~festivals~~ events (such as Holy Week processions), but have very secularised values and attitudes. In those spheres, the Catholic Church is insignificant or completely ignored.

Though more recent than in other European countries, a ‘religious transition’ has occurred in Spain. The Church and the state occupy increasingly separate spheres (Gordon 2005) and faith is completely separate from the state and political decision-making. Deep transformations in recent decades –from dictatorship to democracy, from a rural, poorly educated country into an advanced urban society– have been accompanied by accelerated secularisation and a drastic revision of religious forms (Pérez Vilariño 1998).

Secularisation theory serves well to explain the transformation of Catholic organisations into civic organisations. Some have adapted heavily to secular society; others have completely secularised but retain similar functions to their Catholic predecessors. These were vital to transforming the Francoist union structure and forming new unions in democratic civil society (Corrales Ortega 2008). The communist-oriented *Comisiones Obreras* (CC.OO.) labour union, for example, grew out of several organized labour such as “Oposición Sindical (OSO)”, various workers commissions like “La Comisión de la Camocha”, as well as the confluence of the Communist Party (PCE) with the Catholic workers’ organizations (AST, JOC, HOAC, and others) (Moreno, 2016).

During Francoism, social participation was organized around three axes: the *party*, the *municipality* and the *union*. Religious organizations were easier to participate, and that their organizations were included in the 1966 law on associations. Subsequently, with the acquiescence of the Catholic Church, changes in these organizations were essential to the transformation of Francoism.

- At the *party* level, the Church adopted neutrality and did not create an explicitly Catholic party (at that time the political parties were illegal in Spain), as in Italy and Portugal. Contributing factors included: concern for not repeating the errors of the Spanish Second Republic (which persisted in collective Church ideology); that most leaders of the new parties had a Catholic background; and the example of explicitly Catholic parties in Italy and elsewhere, where the Church had experienced resounding defeat.

- At the *union* level, CC.OO. was fundamental in transitioning from a vertical union to multiple unions. Again, the Church was key in the formation of union leaders; ‘worker priests’ were very important at the micro-level of training and preparing a new generation of Spaniards in democratic values. ‘Worker priests’, young seminarians in unions and secularized social movements such as HOAC, JOC or Acción Católica Obrera (ACO) offset the working-class anticlericalism that had emerged in the early twentieth century. Their solidarity gave them a prominent role in the transition to democratic civil society (Botey 2011; Pérez Pinillos 2004).
- At the *municipal* level, Francoism sought participation through religious associations, especially those intended for heads of families. The markedly religious Unión Nacional de Asociaciones Familiares Española (UNAF) (Spanish National Union of Family Associations) was created in 1966 (after the French model of 1948) to pursue top-down control of participation in civil society around the family and its needs. These legally recognised associations could be viewed as the seedbed for the neighbourhood movements and associations that were fundamental in the transition. (Ayuso, 2007).

Civil society: an elusive concept

The concept of civil society suffers from imprecision (Alexander 1997), even in its most useful recent dimensions. Describing it as a complex social network formed by the set of social networks that connect and intertwine individuals strengthens its position as a link between the individual and the state. Civil society, as the space in which social solidarity is defined in universal terms, is the ‘we’ of a national community in the strongest possible sense. There, the interconnection of each community member transcends individual commitments, narrow loyalties and sectarian interests (Alexander, 1997), thereby ensuring the sustainability of civil society. It transcends groups formed around religion, class, race or other traditional criteria and forges links between them.

Civil society can also be understood as a great social network with individual and collective actors: organisations and institutions pursuing private or public objectives in the public sphere of the state (Knoke, 1990; Keane, 1988). Similarly, it can be conceptualized as a network of individual and collective rights and actions established within the state, which guarantees them to greater or lesser degree. This network of rights and actions for institutions, organisations and associations forms the framework for privately motivated individual and collective actions with a public dimension (Rosales, 1994). Civil society, then, consists of everything that is neither state nor markets, but which needs both to survive. The three separate but linked spheres of civil society, the state and the markets should not be confused with each other, but they depend on each other for their existence and development. Civil society cannot be ‘extracted’ from the state, which provides the entire legal framework that sustains society as a whole (Helds, 1987).

The following pages explain the role of the Spanish Catholic Church in the transition from Francoist authoritarianism to democratic civil society.

Methodological frame

The path dependence mechanism

Through the path dependence mechanism (Mahoney 2000), historical sociology argues that present-day social institutions rely heavily on processes derived from antecedent institutions. This has important implications for social research, as path dependence explains why certain dependent trajectories and sequences have generated institutions that merit special attention due to the historic, legal, political, and social contexts in which they developed.

Using path dependency (Hall and Taylor 1996), we may argue that the development of Spanish civil society is highly dependent on historical-legal frameworks and socio-cultural contexts. Accordingly, present-day civic organisations are highly dependent on those formed historically in the Catholic Church. Such institutional inertia stems from the high investment cost associated with creating such civic organisations *ex novo* today (Levi 1997; Pierson 2000). The current network of civic organisations in Spanish society grew out of specific patterns determined by the prominence of the Catholic Church at a specific historical moment (Griera et al. 2014). Using this analytical perspective, we will look at the emergence of Spanish civic organisations that originated as Catholic organisations. Here also, the Church has assisted the transition to democracy and the consolidation of democratic civil society in Spain.

Historical, social and political context

Historical sequence

The Spanish transition to democracy came about through a series of agreements among elites in direct, secret negotiations. The forty-year Francoist regime ended in political suicide, then dissolved, transformed and democratised itself. In fact, ‘the pact-rapture model of reform from above had not yet been invented’ (Linz 1992). The process required an important actor in the Franco regime to soften its presence to make room for a key feature of democracy –laicism– and the formation of a democratic state. Since transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy are explained by the national powers involved (Sastre García 1997), the actors must adapt and find new frames for action. Socioeconomic development and modernization in the 1960s had generated increasingly severe contradictions between economic liberalism and the authoritarian state/regime, making democracy an irreversible outcome of its political demise (Preston 1985; 2001; Tusell 2011). Political forces created by economic development enabled

social mobility and participation in a context of urbanization, increased education, the development and influence of mass media, increased per capita income, etc. By favouring political non-participation, the Church provided substantial support during the regime crisis, as transition to democracy became requisite for modernization (Colomer 1995; Sastre García 1997; Jiménez-Díaz and Delgado-Fenández 2016; Gunther 1992).

The successive roles of the Catholic Church following the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) generated the religious institutions that later helped establish organisations in Spanish civil society. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Church collaborated so closely with the Franco regime that national and religious identity merged: to be Spanish was to be Catholic. Later, the Church apologetics of 1973 decisively revealed the weakened relationship between the Church and the regime. During the transition to democracy, the Church recognised the separation of spheres: public/private, church/state, Catholicism/other faiths. Since 1978, the Church has coexisted with other faiths and adapted to advanced secularisation in Spanish society.

Each of these periods had a specific legal and social framework. The first two decades after the Spanish Civil War were framed by the 1953 Concordat between the Holy See and the Spanish state.² However, in the 1960s tension grew between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the regime, stemming mainly from the Second Vatican Council, which introduced new dynamics between religion and civil society (Martinez-Torrón 2006). Significantly, the first Spanish Law on Religious Freedom was passed in 1967, legalising non-Catholic public religious worship (Blanco 1999, 2009). It was in force when the third stage began with the transition to democracy. The Constitution of 1978 granted broad freedoms concerning religion, relations with other faiths (Estruch et al. 2007), and civil society. The current stage, with its highly secularised social framework, social-political forces, and legal framework for religious freedom, materialised with the 1979 Concordat and the 1980 Organic Law on Religious Freedom (LOLR).³ This sequence demonstrates the positive social function of the Spanish Catholic Church in the development of civil society.

Within the Church, however, turmoil and divisions emerged between the established hierarchy that remained loyal until the mid-1970s and a younger generation that embraced liberation theology, Vatican II and social justice. (Martinez-Torrón 2006).

The Church and political change

The Second Vatican Council deeply altered church-state relations, but for different reasons in Spain than in other countries. Here, the official position of the Catholic Church changed, rather than state policies. In confronting the transition to democracy following Franco's death, the Church managed to maintain a more neutral position than it had during and after the Civil War. In fact, the Church actually assisted the democratic transition by not explicitly supporting any political party. Withdrawing from partisan politics and becoming politically independent was arguably the Church's

greatest contribution to political change (Enrique y Tarancón 1996). The Church neither created nor supported a Christian democratic party, though some centre and centre-right politicians disagreed with this stance. Refusal to sponsor any form of political ideology was one of the Church's most important steps towards participating in a more integrated civil society.

The Spanish Catholic Church was able to strengthen civil society mainly due a series of changes in the 1960s, derived from Vatican II and clear re-positioning with respect to the Franco regime. The social and political transformations of the late Franco dictatorship and the emergence of democracy also brought decisive changes to the Spanish Church. Earlier, the Church had functioned as a 'civil religion' by offering religious legitimacy to the regime (Mardones 1990) and a convenient interpretation of the traumatic events of the Civil War, on which regime legitimacy rested. In the transition to democracy, however, the Church significantly helped discredit the regime and Spanish Catholicism experienced profound changes in relation to the broader social context.

After Franco's death, the Church hierarchy demonstrated interest in a new, plural, democratic political system for Spanish society (Enrique y Tarancón, 1996).⁴ It sought political neutrality and freedom to exercise its apostolic ministry alongside other religious options. These arguments were thoroughly developed in agreements and documents specifying Church-state relations. Just before and during the transition years, the Spanish episcopate adapted the results of the Second Vatican Council to the Spanish socio-political reality (Episcopado Español 1968a; 1968b; 1971; 1973; 1975). This reflected a shift towards greater personal commitment and the Church's interest in being an institution composed of members who were Catholics based on conviction rather than tradition or social pressure (Enrique y Tarancón 1996).

How Spaniards understood the relationship between religion and politics also changed significantly. Religion was no longer the legitimiser of a socio-political system, but of change (Casanova 1994b). Amidst changes in Spain and across Europe, the Church wanted Catholicism to continue being the religion of Spain and sought to adapt accordingly. It acknowledged the separation of political and religious power along with its own diminished relevance in Spanish society, to avoid the risk of collapsing with the delegitimised regime. In Spanish democratic culture and society, a new religious dynamic would have to develop, one that involved a shift in individual consciences and institutional roles and functions.

Slowly, the Catholic Church came to terms with secularisation (Casanova 1994a) and the need for multiple political options. Committed faith could coexist with various political alternatives and Christian faith itself could lead to different political commitments. The Church opened its doors to the political spectrum: the common good should be expressed through many political options and no single social or political system could fully express the richness of the evangelical spirit. The Joint Assembly of Bishops and Priests (*Asamblea Conjunta de Obispos y Sacerdotes*) officially confirmed

this view in September 1971, when the participants voted to apologise publicly for having failed bring the Spanish people together in the aftermath of the Civil War (Linz 1993).

The transition to democracy entailed a process of conciliation that has involved a break with the traumas and scars of the past. The Church wisely opted for political neutrality, by which it assisted a peaceful transition to democracy. This turning point in the history of religion and politics in Spain involved the separation of religion from right-wing parties, resulting from the decision of Spanish bishops to abandon the Christian democratic political project. By deliberately moving away from partisan involvement during the transition, the Church could participate alongside many others in a society striving for democracy. The partisan neutrality of the episcopate marked the institutional withdrawal of religion from politics and allowed ‘believers’ to participate across the political spectrum. Since then, Catholics have been represented in multiple parties (Mardones 1990).

Spanish views on religion and politics have also changed. The relationship between religiosity and specific party membership has weakened considerably. Many voters from the largest left-wing party, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) (PSOE), are practicing Catholics to some degree. Consequently, the party avoids making anti-clerical speeches, lest it lose a large segment of the electorate. This has given the PSOE several majorities in Parliament. Positive or negative dynamics between politics and religion now arise at specific moments over specific issues. Topics that have traditionally affected this relationship and created tension between the Church and Spanish democratic governments –most significantly the Socialist government– include divorce, abortion, education, healthcare, social welfare policies and same-sex marriage. However, tensions related to specific issues should not be construed as a Church pretence for political participation. When the PSOE assumed power in 1982, it was without conflict between Catholics and members of this moderate-left party that championed social democracy⁵ (Gordon 2005).

Vatican II established a reference frame for Church-state relations. The Council neither recommended nor rejected legal-political separation, but it was implicitly acknowledged as the system that is universally extended today. The Spanish system can be described as one of coordinated separation, as cooperation between the Catholic Church and other faiths is expressly foreseen in Article 16.3 of the Constitution (Corral Salvador, 2004). Though the Church accepts religious pluralism, it receives special recognition in several aspects including: a) subsidies for religious schools b) religious education in public schools c) mention in the Constitution.

Democracy is pluralism. Ideological pluralism was encouraged and aided by official Church neutrality and the new religious openness of believers. Ideological pluralism extends to values, ethics, and morals. Though the Catholic Church resisted abandoning its moral monopoly in Spain, with the advent of democracy it became one

voice among many in the public sphere (Perez Diaz 1997). This implied tension between the hierarchy and the younger generation of priests. The tension was resolved by the Church's own need for legitimacy, which had been damaged by its links to the dictatorship. To survive as a respected institution in democracy, the Church would have to change course.

This structural shift corresponds to a radical shift in the legitimacy of the civic values comprising the common solidarity required for democracy to function. The highly respected moral guidance offered by the Church now competes with other definitions of ethical behaviour. Visions and traditions that contradict Christian tradition or some of its official interpretations now actively participate in the public sphere. This appears in the discussion and approval of laws related to divorce, abortion, education, and greater sexual permissiveness (Mardones 1990). The legalisation of same-sex marriage has been another major point of confrontation in church-state relations (García Oliva 2008). Leaving any assessment of these confrontations aside, the ethical pluralism that now exists can certainly be recognised as an achievement.

The Catholic Church in the early twenty-first century is organised as an interest group with regard to political activity. Economic funding by the state or religion in schools are among the important issues protected by the 1979 Agreements.⁶ However, the PSOE government has its own programme; actions such as the approval of same-sex marriage or abortion place the Catholic Church in confrontation with the PSOE and left-wing parties in general (Aguilar 2012).

Spaniards have experienced a major political and religious transition that has not produced religious decline or de-sacralisation of the world, but a growing split between religion and certain dimensions of social and personal life (Diaz Salazar 1993b). Now, politics and other areas are considered mainly private matters and religious attitudes are nuanced by the individual's conscience (Pérez-Agote 2012). Relevant data indicates that a very large group of non-practicing Catholics⁷ (CIS 2016; Gonzalez Anleo and Gonzalez Blasco 1992) maintain their belief in God and the Church, albeit more personally and privately than what is proclaimed in the Catechism.

The democratic Spanish state has no official religion. With the liberation implicit in the transition to democracy, the spiritual multiverse in Spain today has created a religious marketplace offering Protestantism, other Christian denominations and even a few eastern religions. However, only 2.4 per cent of Spanish people identify themselves as believers in religions other than Catholicism, while 13.3 per cent identify themselves as non-believers and 9.8 per cent as atheists (CIS 2016). Religious pluralism has relativized Catholicism as one among many religious offers and reinforced privatising trends. The Catholic Church itself brought this about. From a religious perspective, the genuine novelty resulting from this transition process has been the directional shift due to modernising forces.

The Church and social change

The numerous, complex transformations in the Church stemmed from social, international, and generational factors that contributed to the social change that led to democracy in Spain. The economic opening of Spain and structural development helped consolidate a *middle-class society* that was foundational to the advent of democracy (Campo 1989). There, the Church also played a crucial role; ordinary priests and lay persons committed to addressing social problems were the first to delegitimise the system. Perhaps the most influential factor in this process was a generational shift that affected the collective conscience of the Church, combined with the effects of higher educational and economic levels, young priests who had travelled abroad and openness stemming from Vatican II. Finally, outside influences –namely tourism and the popular movements of the 1960s in Europe and the United States– fostered an important cultural and religious opening in Spain. Positional gaps developed in the priesthood and the laity, tending toward democracy and pluralism (Mardones 1990).

The profound social convulsions that began in the late 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s re-positioned the clergy and part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Three fundamental changes occurred that affected the Church: the expansion of education, particularly university education (especially for women); rural migration to cities and a new urban industrial working class; and the emergence of a consumer society linked to growing prosperity and the impact of tourism. This set new moral standards of independence, permissiveness, and pleasure seeking among young people that conflicted with traditional norms and controls (Pérez Díaz 1993). It generated a greater revolution in Spain than in other European countries; across generations and in all areas of society, from politics to religion to morality. It was particularly evident among clergy in contact with the working class (Linz 1993) and in religious orders with many members working abroad. ‘Worker priests’ influenced by liberation theology became especially relevant as liaisons between the Church and working-class needs and values. Most had participated significantly in forming organisations that had fought for political and labour freedoms under the dictatorship (Corrales Ortega 2008).

The Spanish ecclesiastical hierarchy managed to resolve the instability generated by political change. Because major changes had already occurred in the Church during the final years of the Francoist regime⁸ (Linz 1993), the dictator’s death, the democratic transition, the Constitution, and even the socialist government in 1982 did not prove overly problematic. However, the role of the Church throughout the democratic process and the outcomes for it and society have not been fully analysed.

The Catholic Church in today’s democratic society

Aside from associations (worker, educational, assistential) that during the transition gave rise to many civil organisations which are now integral to Spanish democracy –such as national labour unions or school-parent associations– the Spanish Catholic Church maintains many non-profit religious associations and organisations that actively seek to keep Catholic values present in civil society today (FOESSA 1983). With extensive secularisation, the Church has stopped trying to remain invisible and aloof from democratisation. Now, it seeks greater visibility in diverse social contexts to avoid being excluded from areas where secularisation has been most intense. The Church pursues a more solid base through schools, universities, and educational institutions, seeking to leave the strictly private sphere assigned to it by secularisation and jump back into the public sphere. In a pluralist environment, it must struggle to maintain its position in a marketplace of increasingly diverse and opposing ideas (McKinnon 2013). The Church works diligently to present itself as an institution concerned for the social problems of citizens and finding solutions in less imposed, more convincing ways.

Through civic participation, Spanish Catholicism seeks to recover the public role it avoided during the transition to democracy and revive religion in public life. The Church envisions a religious reality that de-privatises Spanish Catholicism in a quest for greater social presence. From more aggressive media presence to participation in public festivities, Catholicism is clearly present in society. This new attitude and effort to revitalise Christian institutions in Spanish culture and society is at odds with a society that has moved religion to the private sphere.

Though the Catholic Church has suffered a significant decline in membership, it now enjoys much greater legitimacy, because it is no longer the almost-compulsory and only faith of belonging (as it was during the Franco regime). A society exposed to world disasters every day through social media is increasingly aware of the Church's role in social solidarity. Spanish citizens now see the Church as an integrating rather than excluding institution. For example, the work of *Cáritas* among the most vulnerable is widely recognised in Spain, and the Church has publicly denounced the policies of successive governments –socialist and conservative – concerning care for immigrants (Itçaina 2006).

Pluralism in Spain creates new frames that foster diverse religious experiences and expressions. A secularised society, placed greater emphasis on private, individual religious experiences than traditional forms, which explains the increasing number of non-practicing Catholics. Despite such great changes, however, most Spaniards still identify themselves as Catholics. They maintain formal organisational links with the Church, turn to the Church for significant life-cycle events and identify with the religious definition of the event. Catholic rites of passage –baptisms, weddings, funerals– are still performed and considered relevant, though 60 per cent of Spanish Catholics almost never go to mass or attend religious services for any other reason (CIS 2016). Declining religious faith is accompanied by a much freer and more autonomous

form of religious life for believers, who tend to accept increasingly diverse and secular practices. Among these is an incipient civil religion linked to democratic culture. More significantly, abandoning religious practice has not meant a loss of faith in democratic Spain: 72 per cent of the Spanish people still identify themselves as Catholics (CIS 2016).

Meanwhile, religion involving a strong doctrinal discipline is fading. The challenge now is to understand and transmit a given reality without serious risk of misinterpretation. In competition with other belief systems, Catholicism must attempt to develop its reasoning on the margins of dogma. Though believers today consider themselves Church members, they feel alienated from traditional practices or complex dogma and not bound by them. ‘New’ doctrine is less dogmatic and more a way of explaining and understanding human and spiritual reality, driven mainly by the believer’s search for personal meaning. It presents a unifying, organic vision of faith stemming from revisionary reflection. Social imperatives have thus driven a process of secularisation within the organised Church.

Faith is somewhat dissociated from Catholic doctrine in Spain today. Many behaviours imply a degree of faith – rites of passage, festivities, pilgrimages, Holy Week – but not conformity with all Church precepts. This is seen in the ever-bolder discourse around open secularity in society or proclamations of groups with anti-religious attitudes. In Spain, practising atheists represent 9.9 per cent and non-believers 13.4 per cent of the population: 23.3 per cent altogether (CIS 2016). However, this group – strongly legitimised by the legal-constitutional non-confessional condition of the state – is perceived to be larger and manifested as such by the media. Consequently, the Catholic Church must maintain a constructive relationship with groups of practising non-believers, as expressed in numerous activities with no direct doctrinal message that serve primarily as a moral example.

Religion has two significant functions of providing social and political legitimacy as well as moral critique (Pérez Vilariño 1997) in a democratic society. Concerning the first, growing tolerance for the values of others is accompanied by a clear preference for values and trends more closely aligned with conservative parties. Though democracy is unquestionably recognised as the best system to which humanity can aspire, a certain affinity exists with the values of parties that have traditionally advocated a Christian way of life.⁹

Political institutions clearly prefer privatised religion in a democratic society, especially in matters that incite religious criticism of policy. Attempts to keep religion out of the public sphere argue that it should be confined to the religious. A quasi-depoliticised institution is probably an advantage in a society with overly-politicised institutions. In Spain today, excessive political partisanship and coercive state politics permeate much of the associative fabric and many social spheres that should be strictly civic, such as universities, unions and entrepreneurial associations. This is perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of Spanish democracy. Most associations are not entirely

independent of large interest groups and the government (Banegas 2017). Unlike the Anglo-Saxon civic model that encourages the emergence of associations around any aspect of civil society, associations in the rest of Europe function around ‘pillarization’: they tend to form around ideological, political and/or economic ‘pillars’ rather than at the core of civil society (Pérez Díaz and López Novo 2003). As a social institution, the Church can and should instruct its members on public actions it considers objectionable or commendable.

Though political, social, and economic circumstances have changed, many Spaniards have been socialised in Catholic values and dogmas. Most people in Spain have received religious education in the last fifty years. Due to intense religious socialisation and significant levels of religious practice in the family environment, the cultural substrate remains essentially Catholic. Religious socialisation is less robust today than in past decades but continues to have socialising force. Though public schools adhere to the constitutional principle of laicity, religious education is offered. Article 27.3 of the Spanish Constitution states that this ‘does not impede the organisation in public educational centres of teaching that is non-compulsory, to allow parents the right to choose for their children the religious and moral teachings that are most in accord with their own convictions.’ (Martín Sánchez 2008). Religion has an average to high level of importance in the lives of 32 per cent of Spaniards (WVS, 2011) and a significant percentage of citizens think religious education is important for children. Religiosity has greater importance in ideological spheres and on sexual or social solidarity issues, and less in the socio-economic sphere or for giving meaning to life (Diaz-Salazar 1993a).

Religiosity also influences a range of social activities related to individualism, work, and participation in associations. Higher levels of religiosity are associated with higher levels of segregation with respect to marginalised groups and higher regard for individual effort, private property, and competition. Higher religiosity also corresponds to higher levels of volunteerism and membership in associations. However, here we find the two extremes: the most and the least religious persons are the most socially active. (Diaz-Salazar 1993a).

Though wearing the Catholic label, this new type of believer is no longer ‘practicing’. Traditional liturgy has lost meaning in a secular context that values freedom and assumes the risk involved in following one’s own path. In Spain today, solidarity is becoming a religion, with increasing numbers of NGO volunteers as a new kind of part-time missionary. This ‘secular clergy’ –without the total commitment required of a calling to a consecrated life– temporarily engages in secular ‘missionary work’ that gives meaning to lives increasingly devoid of religion. A person can do volunteer work without having to accept difficult dogmas. NGOs constitute a kind of new church where the individual can commit for a time and easily leave when life circumstances change. Though the recent economic crisis in Spain has not led to

increased participation, Catholic solidarity organisations have been highly visible and shown the greatest constancy (*Cáritas*, for example) in supporting the needy.

These circumstances have helped change how younger generations define morality (including sexual morality). Moral issues are now autonomous or secular domains without a religious frame of reference, even among school-age youth. Similar processes began approximately two decades ago among Spain's European neighbours, stemming from increased individual freedom and political autonomy (Perez Vilariño 1990; Strømsnes 2008). This precipitated a shift towards greater pluralism and multiple frames of reference, none of which is perceived as absolute.

The Catholic Church and the civic fabric in democratic Spain

The Catholic Church as an institution has always demonstrated great capacity for adaptation. Since the Middle Ages, it has undergone vast transformation, overcome its initial hostilities to markets, political freedom and cultural tolerance; and now even contributes positively to the development of civil society (Pérez Díaz 1997). In pre-modern times, religious dynamics were expressed in the proliferation of religious orders based on rules, obedience, and cloister. Today, adaptation is evident in the proliferation of autonomous and community organisations in civil society, often with no religious connotations whatsoever (Perez Vilariño 2001).

With the advent of democracy, pluralism, and a strong service sector, ecclesiastical structure had to be redefined, giving careful attention to the social capital of the Catholic Church and its societal interaction networks. Declining numbers of religious personnel have also made the Church reconsider its relation to society. In a pluralist environment, religious messages become less dogmatic and more transactional (Pérez Vilariño 1998). To function in increasingly democratic contexts, a formerly exclusive Catholic Church must coexist and 'sell' its message alongside other actors, including non-believers or atheists, in the religious marketplace. Many Catholic organisations have adapted to the new needs of civil society.

Though the Spanish Catholic Church has limited experience with civil society, as an institution it carries the greatest symbolic weight in Spain and is the largest macro-social institution in terms of membership. No other institution in Spain can bring together 33 per cent of the adult population every week (CIS 2016). This has enabled the Catholic Church to integrate rapidly into civil society.

Church participation has undeniably declined in Spain, as individuals today reject militant commitment to voluntary institutions that make vital demands on their members. Membership in associations is recovering numerically, but only a little over 40 per cent of the population claims membership in an association (WVS 2011), which is an increase compared to previous decades. Participation in associations decreased

from 33 per cent of the population in 1981 to 22 per cent in 1990, then increased to reach 34 per cent by 2011 (CIS 2011). In 1990, only 5 per cent of young people claimed affiliation with an association (mainly sports, cultural and religious). In 2011 however, 35 per cent of young people reported belonging to an association (CIS 2011). Practicing Catholics as a group had the highest membership in various types of associations (CIS 1990).

Relatively speaking, the Catholic world continues to be very important in Spain. Between 30 and 40 per cent of the Spanish population can be considered practicing Catholics (CIS 2007; ISSP 2008): which is very high compared any other group defined by beliefs or attitudes in society. For example, scarcely 5 per cent of the population identify with the political left or are active in parties and unions (CIS 2013).

With significant numbers of full-time workers in parishes throughout Spain, the clergy comprise a very important sector of socio-cultural leadership in Spain and can shape public opinion. Nearly a third of the Spanish population hears their ideas weekly. The Church still has powerful capacity to bring people together (Smith 2008) and homilies influence opinions and attitudes.

The Catholic Church is firmly established in democratic civil society. As the most important associational institution in the country, its significance far outweighs that of cultural, business, labour, political, and neighbourhood organisations. Today, approximately 10,000 Catholic associations are listed in the Register of Religious Entities (Ministry of Justice),¹⁰ alongside other unregistered associations. Their reach extends to family movements (with approximately 3.2 million members), charities, social volunteerism, children's services, leisure activities, popular culture, and solidarity with impoverished countries. Catholic Action movements are especially noteworthy: the Catholic Action Workers' Brotherhood (*Hermandad Obrera de Accion Catolica-HOAC*) and the Young Christian Workers (*Juventud Obrera Catolica-JOC*) were very important in creating labour unions (*Comisiones Obreras-CC.OO*, *Unión Sindical Obrera-USO*). The Catholic Confederation of Parents of Students (*Confederación Católica Nacional de Padres de Familia y Padres de Alumnos CONCAPA*) has about three million members. *Manos Unidas* is the largest development aid NGO and *Cáritas* is the largest NGO fighting against poverty and marginalisation. Alongside these are Catholic hospitals, schools, universities, social media, publishing, etc.

Catholic associationalism permeates Spanish society and shapes attitudes toward social participation. Civic associations have emerged from it. As the largest network of organisations with similar aims in Spain, linked to a Church with presence on five continents, it can channel information to a third of the Spanish population and generate citizen awareness regarding the most impoverished countries.

In a weak civil society such Spain's (Subirats 2001; Buqueras and Bach 2002), the Catholic Church has created a network of civic engagement thanks to the territorial scope of its organisations and the variety of sectors in which it operates. It is the largest

voluntary social organisation that has ever existed in Spain (Diaz-Salazar 1993b) and has provided a framework of associations that support an important section of Spanish democratic civil society.

Conclusions

This paper describes the role of the Catholic Church in the Spanish transition to democracy in the 1970s, its political involvement and how it has supported the continuity of civil society in Spain. Important changes in the Catholic Church itself, stemming from the Second Vatican Council, helped move the Spanish Catholic Church toward democratic transformation and the consolidation of a plural Spanish civil society. We have also identified the Church as a main driver for developing civic organisations in Spain. The political neutrality of the Church during the transition enabled many pre-transition Catholic organisations to articulate and support an important network of civic organisations in democratic Spain.

New ways of interacting with civil society have led the Catholic Church on a quest for innovative ways of negotiating in a plural, diverse, ever-changing environment that requires ongoing adaptation. In this dynamic transaction with civil society, the Catholic Church strengthens democracy in Spain through a liberal commitment of respect and autonomy among religious, political, and social spheres. The Church has contributed to bolstering a democratic civil society through a number of interrelated ways, including its ability to adapt to a dramatically secularizing society.

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Notes

¹ A and D represent authoritarian and democratic regimes, respectively, that are relatively stable and long-lasting, while lower-case a and d represent shorter, less-stable authoritarian and democratic regimes (Huntington 1991).

² *Concordato entre la Santa Sede y el Estado Español*, August 27, 1953.

³ LOLR: *Ley Orgánica de Libertad Religiosa*.

⁴ On this point, see the homily given by Cardinal Enrique y Tarancón during the Mass of the Holy Spirit on 27 November 1975, when Juan Carlos I was proclaimed King of Spain. In addressing the King, the Cardinal stated expressly: “[...] you take the reins of the State in an hour of transition [...]. Spain, with the participation of all under your care, advances in its path and this will require the collaboration of everyone, the prudence of everyone, the talent and determination of everyone to make this the path of peace, progress, liberty and mutual respect that we all desire.” In this historic homily, Tarancón emphasized the political neutrality of the Catholic Church during the transition to democracy: “[...] the Christian faith is not a political ideology and cannot be identified with any of them, because no social or political system can encompass the riches of the Gospel”. Finally, he also expressly calls for democracy: “The Church will never determine which authorities should govern us, but will require all of them to serve the entire community; to respect without discrimination or privilege the rights of the individual person; to protect and promote the exercise of the appropriate freedom for all and the necessary participation in common problems and decisions concerning governance.” (Enrique y Tarancón 1996: 864-866).

⁵ The archbishop Elias Yanes and even Enrique y Tarancón himself proclaimed in the 1980s that it would be good if a left-wing party governed Spain. This may have scandalized many Catholics but it helped the PSOE in an important moment for the country (Gordon, 2005).

⁶ The 1979 Agreements consisted of four accords signed by the Government of Spain and the Holy See on 3 January 1979, which reformed the Concordat of 1953 (signed by

the Franco government) and declared the non-confessional condition of the State as established in the Constitution of 1978.

⁷ In 2016, 60 per cent of Spaniards who profess Catholicism said they almost never go to Mass or other religious acts. Only 14 per cent of Spanish Catholics attend Mass almost every Sunday and religious holiday (CIS 2016).

⁸ The most significant changes in the Spanish Church occurred in the final years of the Franco regime. The commendable work of Cardinal Tarancón prepared the Church for the change of regime, in order to avoid confrontation with the political parties. It is impossible to comprehend the decisive contribution of the Church during the transition to democracy in Spain apart from the role of Cardenal Tarancón (Martín de Santa Olalla, 2012; Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, 1996).

⁹ A good example of this is the fact that left-wing parties such as the PSOE, the communist Izquierda Unida and the recently formed Podemos party continually seek to revise the Church-State agreement in order to revoke such supposed privileges. See for example the two main Spanish national newspapers, *EL PAIS* and *ABC*:

http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2015/10/18/actualidad/1445192879_502492.html

http://www.abc.es/sociedad/abci-podemos-vuelve-carga-contra-religion-pide-reducir-horas-castilla-la-mancha-201606021903_noticia.html

http://www.abc.es/espana/abci-participa-sevilla-hacen-propuesta-4775402577001-20160226030000_video.html

¹⁰ Religious Entities Registry of the Ministry of Justice:
<http://Maper.mjusticia.gob.es/Maper/RER.action>