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BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHASTITY

A Study of Spanish Nuns

By

Mary P. Edmunds

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the Australian National University.

February 1986

Alice: The question is whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.

Humpty Dumpty: The question is [who] is to be the master.

Lewis Carroll 1960:269.

Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón,
sin ver que sois la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.

Mary Edmunds.

Mary P. Edmunds

February 1986

Acknowledgements

I would like this thesis to stand as a tribute to the women of the Centre-South Spanish Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and also to other remarkable women of the Society I have known in Australia and elsewhere. The study has been for me in many ways a resolution of the past as well as an attempt to tackle broader issues. In this sense, I have worked on it as an expression of the thanks that I would like to give to so many of the women of the Society whose affection and support has been constant over the years and through many stages. It is an affection and support that has given me an ineradicable sense of the fineness of altruistic values and of the great potential of goodness. Some of these women also provided me from earliest days with a model of women's work that indicated, in however constrained and fugitive a way, the joy of professional fulfilment. That this was as much in spite of, rather than because of, their membership in the official Church perhaps enhances the personal quality of their influence.

In the context of this study, my thanks go especially to the nuns in Spain who offered me not only their willing help but also their friendship. Of these I can mention only a few, but they represent the many others who allowed me to impinge on that most precious of commodities, their time. Our first months as a family in Madrid were made a delight by Paz Martínez, Mari Carmen Zerolo, and Ludo Alberdi. Paz also spent long hours that were boring for her but invaluable for me in drilling me in the complexities of Spanish verbs.

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With regard to the overall argument I have developed in the thesis, some of the women of the Spanish Province will agree with what I have said. Many will not. For those who will find something positive in the study, I offer my analysis as a contribution towards their continuing interpretive practice. For those who may find what I have said hurtful, I can only ask their forgiveness, and give the assurance that the only repayment I could make for all the welcoming kindness and the friendship

shown to me by individuals and communities was to present the truth as I, with my own preconceptions and limitations, came to see it. I hope they will accept it in this spirit.

Abstract

This study is about a group of Spanish nuns who belong to an international teaching Congregation. The lives of these women have been shaped by their position in two distinct but related social formations. One of these is the Roman Catholic Church; the other is Spanish society. The position of the nuns in each instance has been determined by historically produced social relations, particularly relations of power, and has been essentially influenced by the place of the Church in Spanish society. The result has been a duality of experience for these women that their present interpretation and practice incorporates and reflects.

Fundamental to this dual experience for the nuns has been the historical and structural effects of their implicit choice of the religious life as an option for autonomy. The option for autonomy, however, was situated within social relations based on hierarchical and patriarchal interpretation that had developed in the Church. In this context, their option for chastity was an implicit attempt, based on a control over their own sexuality and its related rejection of a socially defined domestic role, for control over their own lives. Because of women's structural subordination within the Church, however, the dynamic of the choice of chastity was generally thwarted and subverted in the institution of religious life to which these women belonged, and the generative relation produced for their practice by patriarchal domination was that of obedience. The structural opposition for these nuns in their experience of traditional religious life, therefore, was an historically constructed contradiction between chastity and obedience. Within the social relations generated by this contradiction, an ideological definition of the symbolic order made orthodox interpretation in the symbolic mode a principal means of control.

For the nuns in the Centre-South Province of the Congregation in Spain, the experience of these general relations was mediated through the particular historical conditions of Spanish society. These acted in their earlier experiences to reinforce traditional relations by isolating the nuns from the effects of their particular involvement in the historical process. At the same time, the nuns' official position within the Church eventually embroiled them in the bitter social and political

conflicts that provoked the outbreak of Civil War in 1936. After 1939, and particularly in the forties and fifties, the same position in the Church insulated them, as happened with the rest of Spanish society, from the pressures for change that developed in other parts of the world. The nuns who experienced these events form one clear group in the Province. Only when the Church itself moved to change official interpretation, which it did in the Second Vatican Council, did the nuns themselves become aware of their isolation and of the need for change. This awareness coincided with fundamental economic and social transformations in Spanish society itself.

The creative acceptance of change by the nuns was based on a shift from symbolic (mythical) to historical interpretation after the Vatican Council and, as a result, their emergence from the dominance of ideology and the symbolic order. Their capacity to change was based on previous experience, limited though it may have been, of spaces of autonomy created by practices based on the expression of their choice of chastity in professional work, particularly in education.

Nevertheless, the practices developed by the nuns in the Centre-South Province in their reinterpretation of their religious commitment constitute what is seen as a possibly intolerable threat to the Congregation as an institution within the Church. As a result, these women are experiencing attempts by the Provincial government to reimpose constraints generated by interpretations and practices rooted in their past. These attempts are based on an ideological reinterpretation of the symbolic order, and central to them is the reinstatement of obedience.

Note on Spanish Spellings

Because of the almost complete inconsistency in English publications with regard to Spanish place names and proper names, I have retained the original spellings throughout the thesis. The two exceptions I have made for places are Catalonia (*Cataluña*) and the Basque Country (*País Vasco* or *Euskadi*); for proper names, I have used the English forms for some of the monarchs. In these few cases there does appear to be general agreement on the use of an anglicized form.

Note on translations from Spanish texts

The translations throughout the thesis from original Spanish documents and texts are my own.

Preface

SPAIN: GENERAL CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

- 8th century: Conquest by the Moors.
Beginning of the Reconquest.
- 1474-1515: Isabel and Fernando, the Catholic Monarchs.
1478: Institution of the Spanish Inquisition.
1492: Conquest of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs.
Expulsion of the Jews.
European discovery of the New World.
- 1516-1700: HAPSBURGS.
1516-1556: Charles V.
1556-1598: Philip II.
1568: Revolt of the Protestants in the Low Countries.
Death of Philip's son, Don Carlos.
1571: Battle of Lepanto; Don John half-brother of Philip II.
1588: Defeat of the Spanish Armada.
- 1702-1714: War of the Spanish Succession.
Loss of Gibraltar to England.
- 1759: ACCESSION OF THE BOURBONS.
Philip V, grandson of Louis XIV of France and
María Teresa, daughter of Philip IV.
- 1808-1812: WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AGAINST THE FRENCH.
1809: First disentailment laws (*desamortización*).
1812: The Cortes of Cádiz; first liberal constitution.
1814: Fernando VII returns to Spain.
1820-1823: Liberal triennium.
Disentailment laws.
1823: Restoration of absolute powers to Fernando VII.
1833: Isabel II.
1833-1839)
1847-1849) The Carlist Wars.
1872-1876)
1834-1837: Disentailment laws of Mendizábal.
1851: Concordat with the Vatican.
1854: Disentailment laws of Madoz.
- 1868: Revolution.
Constitution.
- 1873: DECLARATION OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC.
1874: THE RESTORATION (Alfonso XII).
1898: The Disaster: Loss of Spain's last colonies, Cuba and
the Philippines
- 1909: Tragic Week in Barcelona.
1923-1930: Dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, father of
José Antonio, founder of the Falange.
1931: DECLARATION OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC.

- Constitution.
- 1931-1934: Republican-Socialist Government; the first biennium.
- 1934-1936: The *Bienio Negro*: defeat of the Republican-Socialist Governments and accession of an anti-socialist republican coalition.
- 1934: Revolt and repression of the miners in Asturias.
- Feb. 1936: Landslide victory of the Popular Front.
- July 1936: Assassination of Calvo Sotelo.
- 17-18 July: Rising of the garrison at Melilla in Morocco.
- 1936: Francisco Franco made Supreme Military Commander of the Nationalist forces.
The legal Government in Madrid.
José Antonio Primo de Rivera captured and executed in Valencia.
- November: Government moved to Valencia.
- 1937: Bombing of Guernica.
Government moved to Barcelona.
- 1939: Fall of Barcelona.
Government moved back to Valencia.
Fall of Valencia, and then of Madrid.
End of Civil War.
- 1939-1975: DICTATORSHIP OF FRANCISCO FRANCO BAHAMONDE.
- 1939-1945: The hungry years.
- 1945-1953: The *noche negra*.
- 1948: Prince Juan Carlos brought to Spain.
- 1953: Treaty with the U.S.A.
American bases in Spain.
Concordat with the Vatican.
- 1953-1963: The struggle for international recognition.
- 1963-1969: Beginnings of the economic 'miracle'.
Growth of tourism.
- 1969: Prince Juan Carlos named as successor to Franco.
- 1970s: 'Pre-post-Francoism'.
- Nov. 20, 1975: Death of Franco.
- 1976: Referendum on political reform.
- 1977: General elections.
- Feb. 1981: Attempted coup d'état.
- Oct. 1982: General elections. Socialist government under Felipe González.

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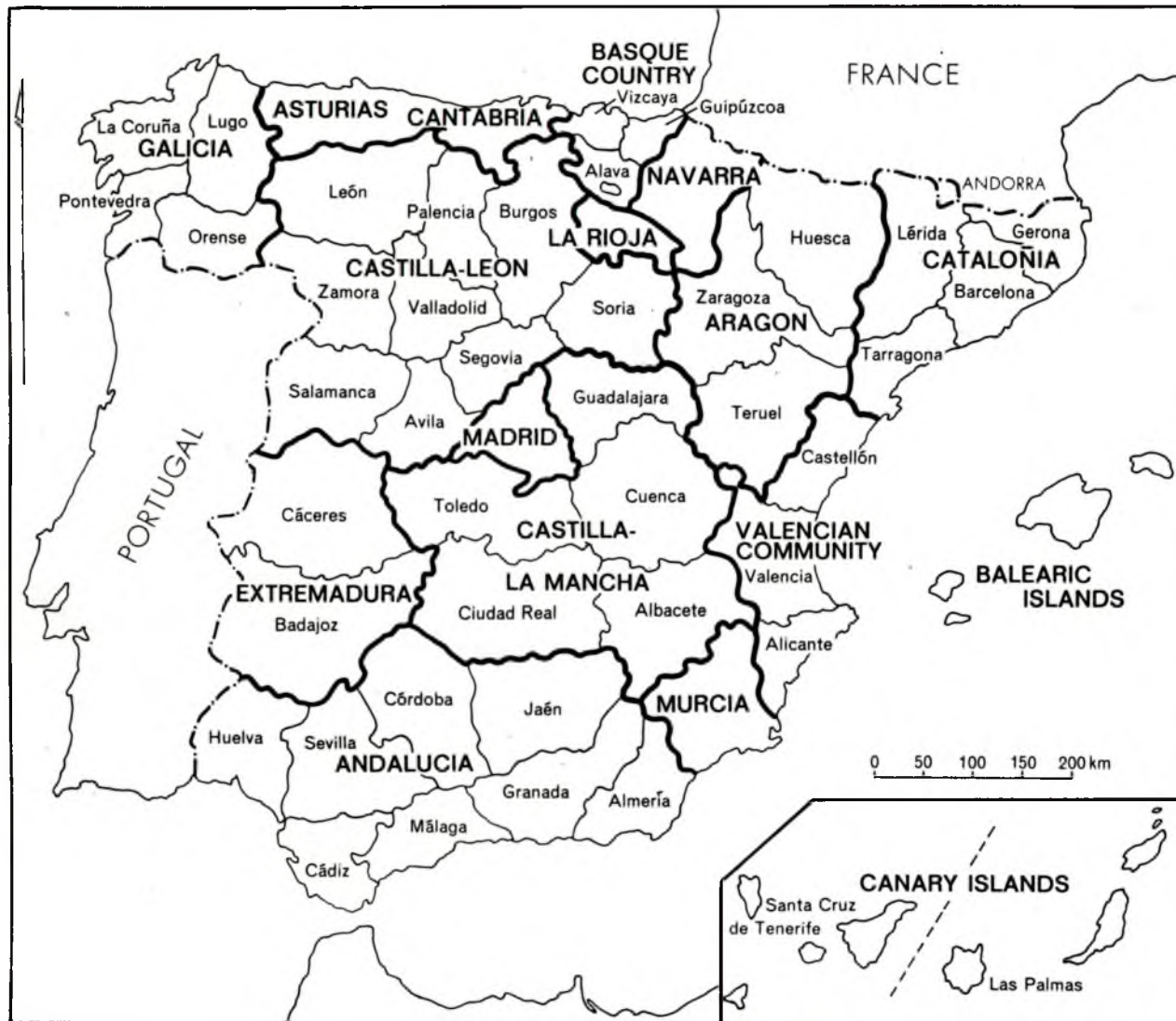


Fig. 1 Spain, Provinces and Autonomous Regions, 1982.
 (From *Atlas Geográfico de las Comunidades Autónomas* 1982.)