Gender & History

WILEY

ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

'Childish' and 'Minors'? Deconstructing Prejudice and Identity Transformation Among Spanish Women Religious During the Long Sixties[1]

Verónica García-Martín

Departamento de Historia Moderna e Historia Contemporánea, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

Correspondence: Verónica García-Martín (veromartgarc14@gmail.com)

Received: 28 June 2024 | **Revised:** 24 July 2025 | **Accepted:** 30 September 2025

Keywords: Franco dictatorship | identities | Second Vatican Council | women religious

ABSTRACT

This article explores the identity formation process undertaken by Spanish women's religious following the *aggiornamento* promoted by the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, it seeks to examine the context in which these women lived and acted, analysing the construction of their identities, their capacity for agency and transgression within ecclesiastical boundaries, as well as the meanings attributed to these actions. In doing so, the article investigates their agency with the primary objective of reconstructing the public debate generated by these renewal dynamics. To this end, it draws on archival materials, periodicals and other contemporary publications that formed the core of these public debates.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) issued a universal call for the renewal of the Church in order to adapt it to the contemporary world. Under the concept of *aggiornamento* – or 'bringing up to date' – the ecclesiastical institution sought not to oppose but to engage with modern currents. For this reason, prominent historians such as Giuseppe Alberigo have argued that the Council marked a point of no return – *non ritorno* – in Catholicism.[1]

However, this event should not be understood as a clear-cut before-and-after moment, as that would imply a linear narrative of Church history. Instead, it should be understood as a profound reflection that laid the foundations for a new ecclesiology and a broader understanding of faith – one that opened the door to transformations over time, even if these have not always become dominant.

That said, and focusing on the main subject of this article, the Second Vatican Council called for female religious life to be renewed and adapted to the demands of the time or the 'signs of the times'. This directive prompted a comprehensive re-examination of the very identity of women religious, challenging the prevailing societal perception of them as possessing a supposedly immutable and homogeneous identity. This is not to suggest, of course, that the identity of women religious[2] had been static prior to the Council; rather, Vatican II created a pivotal moment and the ideal conditions for these women – who had chosen to profess the three vows – to critically reflect on who they were, who they wished to become and, no less importantly, how they wanted society to perceive them. As Joan Chittister, the American Benedictine, aptly notes, 'renewal, ironically, required deconstruction'.[3]

In light of the above, this article aims to investigate the identification process undertaken by Spanish women religious following

This publication is part of the projects PID2022-139462NB-I00 and PID2023-147203NA-I00 funded by MICIU/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and ERDF/EU. I thank the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the article and their valuable comments and suggestions, which have contributed to improving this manuscript.

the call for *aggiornamento*. Specifically, it seeks to delve into the context in which they operated to examine the construction of their identities, their capacity for agency and transgression within ecclesiastical boundaries, as well as the meanings embodied in such actions. The analysis will, therefore, explore their agency, with the central purpose of reconstructing the public debate that these renewing dynamics provoked.

Identities – in this case, those of women religious – are neither static nor immutable; it is thus important to highlight both their internal plurality and their variability. During the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), the National Catholic discourse sought to homogenise these consecrated women, producing a particular representation of the woman religious that did not align with the expectations of many of them, especially in the aftermath of Vatican II.

Indeed, a historical analysis of identities requires reflection on their very nature, and a critical interrogation of the concept of 'identity' itself. First and foremost, it is essential to emphasise that identities – or identification processes – are historically contingent and shaped by the specific contexts in which they emerge.[4] Therefore, they are dynamic constructions shaped by multiple intersecting elements and identity categories – such as gender and religion – that interact with and confront one another.[5]

Identities must thus be understood as 'multiple, fragmented, and fluid' and 'produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices'.[6] It is precisely this critical conception that informs the approach taken in this article, which seeks to challenge the notion of a supposedly immutable identity of women religious. Moreover, identities are never unilateral; they are constructed through the interplay between 'self-perception' and 'public image'.[7] Accordingly, this article will analyse the discourses articulated among actors and the tensions these interactions produced.

Among the various modes of identification outlined by Brubaker and Cooper, this study will highlight two interrelated typologies.[8] First, there is relational or categorical identification: a woman religious could identify herself through her position within a relational network (e.g. her 'kinship' among 'sisters') or as part of a group whose members share categorical attributes such as gender and religion. Second, identification may be internal or external. Concerning the former – self-identification – it is important to stress that, although personal, it always depends on interaction with other agents. As for external identification – how others define the subject – it is necessary to highlight the role of formalised systems of categorisation, typically upheld by institutions and, in Bourdieu's terms, endowed with 'symbolic power'. In this case, the Church and the Francoist dictatorship, bound together through National Catholicism, categorised women religious according to an amalgam of identity-based prejudices.

In this way, an immutable 'illusory sameness' was constructed among women religious, one that was attributed to them in a generalised and predetermined manner.[9] It constituted a kind of 'fantasy echo': the constant repetition of an imagined identity that was seldom questioned.[10] It was, therefore, grounded in the prejudices resulting from external identification. Such a 'static' conception of women religious did not reflect the plural reality of the group, but rather aligned with the National Catholic ideology's desire to homogenise and frame them according to its own interests. The reproduction of this discourse, which will be examined in detail later, was widely disseminated and internalised within society. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider the self-perception of women religious themselves, and their capacity for agency in the face of these imposed identities.

Historiography has tended to perpetuate certain archetypes, and although notable exceptions exist, the topic has not received sufficient attention to unravel the complexity of female religious life or the agency of Spanish women religious. This is due, in part, to the influence of classical secularisation theory, which, although now largely superseded, conceived of the relationship between religion and modernity as inherently antagonistic.[11] In this sense, women religious were supposedly devoid of agency, as they remained subjugated to the authority of the Church. This view has also contributed to a certain reluctance to study them from a historical perspective, specifically within the field of gender studies.[12] However, as Saba Mahmood emphasises, women within religious traditions also possess agency: They may develop strategies to reformulate and recode their space and modes of action within religious institutions.[13] In this regard, the identity of women religious shaped both their capacity for agency and how that agency was understood. It is also important to note that such actions, in turn, affected their identity – either reinforcing it or prompting its reconfiguration.

This study, consequently, takes into account the continuities and discontinuities surrounding the identity of women religious, the historicity and contextualisation of the categories that were essential to the configuration of their identities, as well as these women's capacity for agency in the face of certain prejudices. It thus affirms that the historical variability of gender constructions must be examined through the lens of religious history.[14]

In short, the article is divided into four sections exploring the identity transformation process among Spanish women religious following Vatican II. First, it examines the homogeneous perception of women religious promoted by National Catholicism. Next, it analyses how these women undertook a process of identity 'self-exploration' as a first step towards renewal. Third, it outlines how some resisted that external identification, criticised it and constructed news representations of themselves. Finally, after this critical process, it addresses certain positions that rejected the paternalism and subordination to which they had been subjected.

To achieve the primary objective of understanding the public debate surrounding the identities of women religious, this article primarily employs periodical sources – e.g. progressive Catholic magazines such as *Vida Nueva*, *Hechos y Dichos* and *Yelda* – archival materials from the Archive of the Spanish Conference of Religious, as well as contemporary publications from the period. Together, these sources capture the complexity of the discourses surrounding the identity configuration of women religious, situating the debates within the dynamics of the specific historical context.

It is also worth noting that, within the chronological framework of the 'long sixties', the study focuses on the years of the Council and post-Council period up to 1978, a time marked by profound transformations in the lives of Catholic women, both lay and religious.[15] Indeed, the use of the concept of the 'long sixties', associated with the so-called 'spirit of '68' and the era's climate of contestation, helps to trace the impact of various social movements – including second-wave feminism – on the Catholic world.[16] Specifically, it highlights how some women religious began to question the traditional models of femininity that remained deeply rooted in religious life. In this way, the aim is to emphasise that *aggiornamento* should not be understood as an isolated process but rather as part of an active dialogue with the sociopolitical and cultural transformations of the time.

1 | *Aut Maritus aut Murus*: The Traditional Ideal of Femininity Under Francoism

The Franco dictatorship, established in 1939, regarded the Spanish Catholic Church as an allied institution and a legitimising force for the new order it sought to impose after the Civil War. In this sense, Catholicism became a constitutive element of the Francoist political project, decisively shaping its actions and, more broadly, identity.[17]

Political and spiritual power became deeply intertwined, and religion was politicised to such an extent that, as Carolyn Boyd notes, it structured the understanding of 'concepts with political implications, such as citizenship, gender, nation, and social order'.[18] The Church thus legitimised the 'new State', Franco's authority, and, consequently, the Francoist political regime.[19] This mutual alliance was later codified legally – especially with the 1953 Concordat, which recognised reciprocal privileges between Church and state – thereby solidifying the consubstantiality of Catholicism and the Spanish nation and consolidating the foundations of National Catholicism.[20]

National Catholic ideology was grounded in a 'pastoral of Christendom' that sought the country's 're-Catholicization', which in turn implied a process of 're-nationalisation'.[21] Within this project, the Church and the dictatorship appealed differently to men and women. In the case of the latter, a model of 'true Catholic womanhood' was promoted, exalting motherhood, the woman's role as wife and her value as guardian of morality.[22] Due to the supposed qualities attributed to women, they were entrusted with leading the spiritual reconquest of society by transmitting moral and patriotic values.[23] In other words, they were expected to act as 'apostles of the faith' within a public sphere understood to be either dechristianised or in the process of re-Christianization.[24]

Although women religious, by their vows, could not embody the feminine ideal of wife and mother, a discourse emerged that exalted their 'social motherhood'.[25] Likewise, they were symbolically married to God despite being excluded from marriage. For these reasons, professing religious vows was also conceived as a legitimate and socially acceptable alternative that did not transgress the established gender order.

They thus fulfilled the National Catholic ideal of domesticity, which was reflected in the growing number of religious women entering religious life amid a climate of religious triumphalism. While it is not possible here to offer an exhaustive overview of female religious life, it is worth noting that, according to the *Guía de la Iglesia en España*, the number of women religious in the mid-1940s was approximately 48,924, rising to 81,987 thirty years later.[26] By 1980, there were 252 congregations spread throughout Spain.[27]

In line with the National Catholic model of femininity, a cloistered archetype was imposed on all women religious during the dictatorship, reducing the plurality of female religious life to a single option: the contemplative life associated with enclosure.[28] This vision was further exalted in Spain through the 'neo-Baroque' rhetoric of National Catholicism, whose claim to legitimacy rested on the reforms the Council of Trent implemented.[29] Specifically regarding women religious, during this Counter-Reformation period and the Franco regime, the cloistered life was held up as the ideal.

In the early modern period, a Tridentine model was established that imposed strict enclosure as the normative framework for nuns. As a result, religious authorities issued a wide range of regulations to ensure cloistered discipline and observance.[30] Under the Franco regime, this ideal of enclosure was exalted through a neo-Baroque discourse infused with Tridentine nostalgia, reaffirming enclosure as the paradigmatic form of female religious life.

In this context, it is no coincidence that the figure of Teresa of Ávila was frequently invoked to exemplify an ideal of consecrated femininity. However, the saint was exalted primarily as a devotional and pious behaviour model. Thus, a rigid model of female sanctity was shaped around a distorted image of Teresa of Ávila, tailored to the interests of the Franco regime. This resulting model focused on a cloistered, self-sacrificing, obedient and charitable Teresa, leaving aside other equally significant traits – such as her act of taking up the pen and raising her voice to defend a certain female autonomy, or the spaces of sisterhood she created in response to male hegemony.[31]

A closer examination of the discourse that associated all women who professed the three vows with a contemplative model of religious life reveals a marked tendency to assimilate cloistered nuns to the exalted ideal of traditional femininity. Lilí Álvarez, one of the most active laywomen in introducing some aspects of second-wave feminism to Spain, denounced this alignment in *Feminismo y espiritualidad* (1964), a work inspired by Cardinal Suenens's *The Nun in the World* (1963).[32] In her book, Álvarez observed that the 'traditional woman' fate converged with that of the contemplative nun. In other words, the ideal of the religious woman fulfilled, in a particularly elevated way, the attributes traditionally assigned to conventional femininity.[33]

She argued that women were 'enclosed' and reduced to the same tasks in both cases. Therefore, the fate of this traditional archetype was *aut maritus aut murus*: 'the protective confinement of the home or the definitive and radical enclosure behind the convent grille'.[34] She further denounced these laws of enclosure, whether

in the secular or religious state, as nothing more than a reflection of what

> man, with or without tonsure, has always sought to uphold this throughout the centuries. It is against these bars, visible or invisible, whether born of custom or rule, that the woman's surpassing spirit has inevitably dashed itself… the very spirit that, through the exercise of her own freedom, would emancipate her and lead her to full maturity.[35]

It should be noted, however, that this notion was not unique to Spain but was widespread internationally; nevertheless, the specific conditions of the dictatorship served to intensify its emphasis. In 1966, Sister M. Charles Borromeo of the Sisters of the Holy Cross – Notre Dame – observed that the prevailing stereotype of women religious was rooted in a 'culturally rigid role' that evoked the figure of 'the good nun'. This archetype embodied traits of meekness that aligned perfectly with a traditional ideal of femininity – an ideal further reinforced by their status as religious women. In this way, Borromeo described this archetype using adjectives such as 'meek, humble, docile, otherworldly, and sometimes childish' – the latter being one of the most frequently repeated at the time and that will be explored in greater depth in this article.[36] This prejudiced perspective led to women religious being perceived as inhabiting a world parallel to the realities of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the 1960s began with the preparations for and the unfolding of the Second Vatican Council – a watershed event within Francoist Spain, as it effectively signed the death certificate of National Catholicism as both an idea and a political project.[37] After all, the 1953 Concordat had placed the Church in a privileged position, granting it the power not only to legitimise the regime but also to destabilise it potentially. In a traditionalist and conservative society, the progressive theses of the Council challenged both the Francoist authorities and the Spanish hierarchy, which, as the magazine *Ecclesia* noted in 1964, appeared to suffer from 'a certain Tridentine fixation'.[38] While this neo-baroque nostalgia was acknowledged by some of the more 'moderate' Catholic magazines, such as the one mentioned above, others that were openly progressive did not hesitate to criticise the Spanish bishops for having spoken so much about the Council of Trent that they arrived hoarse at Vatican II.[39] Indeed, these symptoms of a neo-baroque conception of Spanish Catholicism rendered the task of renewal anything but straightforward.

With the reception of Vatican II, the Church found itself confronted with the supreme mandate of *aggiornamento*, a call for renewal markedly distant from the crusading rhetoric that had been omnipresent during the early years of the Franco dictatorship. Among more progressive women religious, there emerged a clear desire to dismantle the stereotyped vision previously described, to step away from rigid roles, and to actively engage in the broader process of renewal taking shape during those years. This shift gave rise to a new representation of the woman religious: 'the new nun'. She was modern, open to change and fully aware of – and engaged with – the challenges of contemporary society. Yet before this transformation could occur, the first step was to reflect on who they aspired to become. To do so, they began by questioning the very foundations that, at the time, shaped their identity.

It should also be noted that the backgrounds of the women religious most open to change were far from homogeneous, making it challenging to identify a clear pattern. Even within the religious institutes, there were differences and tensions among the sisters, complicating any attempt to define a singular profile of the so-called progressive nuns – although they were broadly united by a shared commitment to 'social justice'. Their identities were, in fact, fragmented and shaped by multiple, intersecting categories. For instance, age stood out among them, often associated with a 'generational gap' that, according to Carmen Mangion, was an overly emphasised rhetoric that reflected a diversity of individual conflicts.[40] However, in Spain, the differences between generations were particularly sharp. This was not only because some had lived through the Civil War but also because some had been formed as religious under National Catholicism. In contrast, others had entered congregations amidst the whirlwind of the Council's reforms. For this reason, it was quite common to hear that younger sisters 'find many traditional forms of the community strange'.[41]

2 | 'And How Do We, the Nuns, See Ourselves?'

The Second Vatican Council had as its primary aim the *aggiornamento* – or 'bringing up to date' – of the Church in relation to contemporary society and its dynamics. In this way, the debates that took place within the conciliar assembly, as well as the documents resulting from these sessions, served to strengthen the dialogue between the Church and the modern world. This objective was addressed in particular by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), which emphasised that the Church was 'an historical reality' and not detached from society, but rather sought to establish channels of communication with it and its challenges in an effort to modernise.[42]

To that end, the Council appealed to the signs of the times 'as measures and tools with which to comprehend the reality of a constantly changing world'.[43] According to John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the three principal 'signs of the times' were the improvement of working conditions, the presence of women in public life and the emancipation of peoples.[44] Without diminishing the importance of the other two, this article will focus on that particular sign which directly concerned women and the transformation they underwent as subjects of rights in various spheres of society.

Although during the 1950s some women experienced considerable dynamism both nationally and internationally, it was not until this pivotal event in twentieth-century Catholic life that the 'female condition' issue gained greater public resonance.[45] However, as Mónica Moreno reminds us, the official discourse on the so-called 'promotion of women' was rooted in a rhetoric of complementarity rather than equality – an idea some Catholic women would later challenge.[46] Beyond the Church's explicit recognition that the new situation of women constituted a sign of the times, the post-conciliar Catholic Church's focus on 'social justice' was essential to delve into the root causes of these issues. In this context, the most committed women religious understood

that both aspects were interconnected and engaged deeply with them, fostering a climate of critique that characterised the post-conciliar period in Spain.

During the Second Vatican Council, women religious were already aware that this event would bring significant change to their identity. Most of them anticipated – with varying degrees of uncertainty, hope or fear – the transformations they would face as women and consecrated persons. As will be emphasised later, some adapted to the new environment in which they found themselves. Others, however, were reluctant to change, exhibiting varying degrees of resistance. As a result, female consecrated life entered a period of transition – and, above all, of identity crisis – during which women religious, who differed significantly among themselves, debated their views on who they were and what their roles should be. As Kobena Mercer points out, identity becomes problematic when it enters into crisis. In the specific case under study, the ideal of the woman religious promoted under Spanish National Catholicism – once believed to be fixed and stable – was challenged and exposed to uncertainty and a plurality of experiences.[47]

In this context, the identity of women religious was shaped, at the very least, in two significant ways: by the directives of the Council calling for renewal and by women's increasingly explicit demands for equal treatment across all spheres of society. As part of the ecclesiastical structure, they were required to take into account the guidelines issued by the Council in order to modernise, as set out in the 1965 decree *Perfectae Caritatis*.

As women, they were keenly aware of the changes society was undergoing regarding acquiring rights and the growing acceptance and normalisation of demands for equality. Therefore, they recognised that renewing their identity required more than simply following the guidelines set by the Council; it was also crucial to remain attuned to the dynamics of society and the evolving trajectory of women's demands within it. In other words, their renewal process had to be grounded not only in their identity as members of religious orders but also as women. In this way, women religious found themselves at a 'crossroads of identity' and acknowledged that they were at a juncture in which it was necessary to reconstruct their own identity.[48]

Thus, women religious engaged in a process of self-reflection as well as a critical examination of the image society held of them. Indeed, one of the first steps in their *aggiornamento* involved analysing the prejudices constructed around their identity. In 1965, a group of women religious described this task as a 'relentless examination of conscience' that led them to ask, 'And how do we, the nuns, see ourselves?'.[49] In other words, the task involved examining their public image and, based on this assessment, beginning a process of questioning whether they truly identified with those categories and whether such identification aligned with their renewal. In this way, they discerned certain characteristics of the archetype of the woman religious exalted by National Catholicism and initiated a process of reflection on its compatibility – or lack thereof – with the signs of the times.

The first systematic effort to gather the collective opinions of Spanish women religious in response to the directives of the Second Vatican Council offered them an opportunity to articulate their views in these terms. In 1963, through the Conferencia Española de Religiosos – Spanish Conference of Religious (CONFER) – the Sacred Congregation for Religious requested that women religious across the country be surveyed in order to assess the state of religious life in Spain.[50] During the summer of that year, dozens of representatives of women religious – such as superior generals and provincials, prioresses and novice mistresses – from various congregations submitted and conveyed their views. Beyond offering insight into the state of female religious life in Spain during the early years of the Council, their responses are also valuable for revealing the changes that had – or had not – been implemented following the 1950 constitution *Sponsa Christi*, such as the formation of federations or the distinction between 'minor' and 'major' papal enclosure.[51] This suggests that, although the Second Vatican Council became the principal driver of renewal, certain reforms had already begun before it.

In the questionnaire, Spanish women religious reflected on the elements that had shaped and structured their lives as they had known them up to that point. The goal, however, was to interrogate those elements and subject them to the light of renewal. They thus asked themselves what it meant to be a woman religious: how they identified and what model of religious life they aspired to embody. In critically examining the dominant traditional archetype, they sought to define the characteristics of the 'new woman religious'. While some still identified with the conservative model, others felt alienated by specific patterns or actively sought to construct a new identity in line with the circumstances of the time. Whether they fully embraced it or not, all participated in the emergence of a new model of religious woman, one that differed from the traditional archetype.

The questionnaire revealed that these women became aware of the society's schematic and narrow image of them – an image that some had internalised and even reinforced themselves. As a result, certain voices within the group highlighted and criticised this portrayal, arguing that it was not in keeping with the spirit of the new era.

A Dominican insisted that it was necessary to avoid giving the impression that the women religious 'distance themselves from the people… and that they expect not only material help from us, but moral support as well, without weakness or sentimentality'.[52] Following this rhetoric, a woman from the Institución Teresiana highlighted the need to abandon the 'chapel spirit' – a narrow-minded piety that had sometimes kept them removed from the reality of society.[53] For her part, a member of the Auxiliadoras del Purgatorio also acknowledged that women religious often encountered a 'bourgeois mentality, and at times even a classist one', which distanced them from the population and reinforced the existing prejudices about them.[54] Beyond a certain separation between women religious and society, these words reveal that some themselves were beginning to perceive that their activities were marked by a form of classism that, in later years, would be openly denounced and explicitly opposed.

Within the responses collected, two main tendencies can be discerned among the women religious during this initial phase of renewal: one dynamic and the other more resistant to change. The first was characterised by a willingness to embrace new

developments and to move towards modernisation. For instance, a novice mistress from the Hijas de Cristo Rey expressed concern, emphasising that they were perceived 'as antiquated and enclosed in a medieval environment.… I long for the Church to indicate all the necessary adaptations we must undertake to eliminate this unease'.[55] Along similar lines, other congregations – such as the Hermanas de la Caridad de Santa Ana – viewed the Council as a powerful opportunity, stating that they awaited 'with fervent love the directives that will emerge from this Second Vatican Council, in order to implement them in whatever pertains to us'.[56]

The second tendency, in its more radical forms, expressed a rejection of any change and aligned closely with the National Catholic principles of the dictatorship. The opinion of one religious sister, whose congregation was present in several countries, is particularly revealing. Drawing a comparison with her French sisters, she stated that they did not share the same understanding of religious life in Spain, and that 'the best religious do not look favorably upon the adaptations to certain ways of seeing and living embraced by our foreign sisters'.[57] In this regard, the influence of the Spanish Church and its National Catholic heritage is significant, as it was sometimes perceived as a bastion against change. Consequently, differing opinions can be observed among women religious from different countries, even when belonging to the same congregation.

Among the variety of topics addressed in the questionnaire, one of the most frequently mentioned concerned formation. Many called for its expansion at all stages of religious life – during the novitiate, the juniorate and after the profession of perpetual vows. They even insisted that without proper education, the renewal of female religious life could not be effectively carried out. With a critical tone, one respondent pointed out that there were nuns who spent 'years and years in a kitchen or administration' and suggested that 'perhaps it would have done them a great deal of good if they had received formation… and opportunity'.[58] In doing so, she denounced the lack of possibilities for instruction in religious subjects. Another institute directly focused on the inequality in formation between women and men: 'If a priest studies for so many years, an apostolic woman religious should as well. Could she not at least have half the formation?' In this regard, the statement continued, 'men religious are less disparaged because they have paid more attention to this point, and people cannot call them *ñoños*'.[59]

What this testimony reveals is that the lack of education was directly associated with one of the characteristics most often attributed to women religious: that they were childish – a label frequently accompanied by the term *ñoñas*, understood here as meaning overly sentimental and lacking in rationality. This infantilism – associated with passivity and thus considered a traditional trait of femininity – was among the most repeated attributes in the collective imaginary surrounding women religious. In this sense, expanding access to education was regarded not merely as a useful tool but as a necessary means of dismantling that perception. However, especially in the aftermath of the Council, some women religious began to argue that the label of 'childish' was not merely the result of limited educational opportunities, but rather stemmed from the paternalism exerted over them by the Church hierarchy.

3 | Neither Childish nor Minors

The introspective exercise undertaken by the women religious following the call for *aggiornamento* triggered a plurality of perspectives regarding their self-identification. The women's diverse experiences gave rise to multiple perspectives on the meaning of religious life, which, combined with the external perceptions imposed upon them, triggered an identity crisis within female consecrated life. By 1972, María Luisa Brey noted in the progressive Catholic magazine *Vida Nueva* that a new model of religious woman was being constructed – one that challenged both the past and the legacy of National Catholicism. For her, the evidence was clear and accompanied by confusion: 'the crossroads are visible, and the birth cannot be more confusing or painful, yet its image is slowly taking shape on the ecclesial horizon. After so much crisis, after so many trials and purifications, what will the woman religious of tomorrow be like?'.[60]

This question was not easy to answer and, in fact, occupied much of the post-conciliar debates. In Spain, as noted, National Catholicism was exalted among consecrated women – despite their internal diversity – a monastic archetype in which cloistered life and attitudes related to self-denial and submission prevailed. Furthermore, they were conceived as timeless and perceived as 'rigidly impermeable to any change'.[61] However, the 'spirit of Vatican II' and its call for *aggiornamento* shook this perception.[62]

After courses, assemblies and many other spaces for both individual and collective reflection, the women religious questioned whether they truly identified with the prevailing archetype of religious life or, on the contrary, rejected it. Faced with that external identification, a debate arose about whether to assimilate or resist that representation which, contrary to common belief, was actually dynamic and open to the changes of modernity.[63] As a result, this identity transformation clashed with many gender principles upheld by the National Catholic discourse, contributing to the delegitimisation of the dictatorship.[64] Moreover, this identity shift was linked to a political stance increasingly distancing itself from the regime.

One of the particularities of this identity redefinition process was that the women religious had no fixed reference point to look to. After examining and exposing the image that society held of them, those who rejected it in favour of renewal began to construct their identity in opposition to the established prejudices. That is, they started to define their identity traits by negating attributes such as being *ñoñas*, childish or passive, among many others. Therefore, those progressive women religious who advocated for a new model of the woman religious did not have a fixed point of reference; rather, they developed it through critical reflection. Far from seeing themselves reflected in that archetype, they faced a puzzle that needed to be reassembled in order to create an image that truly resonated with their own sense of identity and, no less importantly, one that could be conveyed to the broader society for recognition. Nevertheless, although renewed, this identity was neither fixed nor monolithic, but dynamic and layered by multiple intersecting categories.

As previously noted, infantilism was one of the most frequent characteristics used to describe women religious.

Therefore, those committed to change sought its counter-model: to assert themselves as both adult woman and religious. As a form of protest, a woman religious wrote in 1973 that, for many people, the condition of being consecrated meant 'being "childish", "broken", "alienated", "useless", "imprisoned", "lonely"'.[65] Consequently, they were regarded as 'eternal minors' in a permanent state of subordination, under the paternal tutelage of the clergy and the maternal authority of their respective superior.[66]

It is illustrative that one of the most common informal ways of referring to them was through the diminutive term *monjita* – from *monja*, meaning nun. This diminutive carried a pejorative connotation – intentional or not – which the more critical voices denounced precisely because of its infantilising undertone. Thus, Begoña Beristain, a woman religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, described it as a 'half-derogatory, half-affectionate name' that concealed 'a complete lack of appreciation, motivated by the prejudice of great childishness and narrow-mindedness toward mature, capable women'.[67]

Rebelling against that vision, it was common for the women religious most committed to renewal to begin expressing their purpose of identity change through a first-person plural discourse that identified them as a united collective. Under the 'we', they sought to distance themselves from the archetype with which they did not identify, pursuing a group consciousness that would collectively challenge the fixed image society held of them. Again, Begoña Beristain stated that 'we, the nuns, must effectively overcome the pattern by which we are judged'.[68] Likewise, María Begoña Isusi, a sister from the Mercedarias de Bérriz, argued that 'we, consecrated women, must be present and active' and should reject an outdated ideal based on separation 'from all reality and consequently without significant influence on the social context that surrounds us'.[69]

In this way, those most receptive to change fought to demonstrate the identity shift – sometimes labelled a 'revolution' – that was occurring within religious life.[70] In the words of Manuel de Unciti, that backdrop was 'in the process of being dismantled'. It would materialise in the gradual change of the women religious' 'social demeanour, which yesterday was somewhat – or to a great extent – like something foolish, *ñoño*, childish, artificial'.[71] A few years later, in 1978, *Yelda* gathered the testimony of a group of women religious from various congregations who noted that the 'image that society, or part of society, has of us does not correspond to reality', although they did not deny that there were still 'nuns with an anachronistic mindset and behavior, fearful of integrating into society's issues'.[72]

However, rather than attributing blame to those women religious, they sought to investigate the underlying reasons behind these 'childish' attitudes. In this reflection, they discovered that the cause did not lie so much in personal reasons as in structural ones that hindered their emergence from that 'minority of age'. Aware of their condition as women and as religious, they recognised that this state was mainly due to the paternalism exerted over them, which prevented them from crossing the 'border into the world of adults'.[73] This paternalistic attitude exercised by the clergy – or the Church – over them limited their autonomy and subordinated them to a state of permanent dependence. Consequently, they did not hesitate to question some of its practices in different areas, chiefly two: the deprivation of access to theological studies and the vow of obedience.

Regarding the first issue, we have already analysed how the 1963 questionnaire prioritised this matter. Indeed, the women religious considered access to theological education essential for renewal and autonomy. However, they faced the difficulty of being unable to pursue it on equal conditions with men simply because they were women. This was pointed out by a woman religious at the 1968 assembly of the Conferencia Española de Religiosas (CER), the representative body of women religious in Spain, when she stated that 'for the first time, Ecclesiastical Universities are opening their doors to women religious, but under conditions that do not guarantee us sound doctrine or proper coexistence'.[74] In this way, women religious viewed their formation as a path towards achieving their longed-for autonomy. Therefore, they sought to move beyond a passive state of subordination to male mandates and, as a woman religious demanded, they needed 'firm foundations in pastoral theology for ourselves – today!'.[75]

As for the second issue, *Perfectae Caritatis* emphasised that obedience should be 'active and responsible'.[76] Those most committed to renewal moved away from a conception of blind, docile and submissive obedience to embrace a dialogical, responsible and participatory model. As expressed by a group of women religious, it was not a matter of 'naively accepting as a dogma of faith everything that is told to us [by the clergy]', but rather of critically debating it.[77] This new understanding of obedience as a reflective and dialogical process encouraged the women religious to question their autonomy and to undertake strategies to achieve it. For example, in 1970, a woman religious indignantly remarked on the submissive compliance that still prevailed in some circles, describing it as one of many 'medieval practices' through which they would 'never be able to escape our much-touted and harmful infantilism'.[78]

In this way, paternalism – which was responsible, among other factors, for the lack of education among women religious and an understanding of obedience as submission – was called into question. In 1967, sister Pilar Moriones, speaking in the first-person plural, stated that 'we, the women religious, find ourselves hanging; dependent on whatever they give us'.[79] According to other women religious noted, they lived 'under the total dependence of men who decide everything in our name, who always have the last word, and who have imposed on us a way of life marked by masculine domination'.[80] In this sense, the spirit of Vatican II, together with the growing awareness around the 'women's question', prompted women religious to challenge their position of subordination within a male-dominated institution. They were, in effect, interrogating the structures of male tutelage that had defined their experience.[81] What follows is an examination of how women religious conceived of their position within the Church and the claims they made regarding this.

4 | Challenging the Prevailing Paternalism

These earlier reactions reveal how certain women religious began to question the paternalism with which they were treated and, from there, as Mónica Moreno argues, sought to establish more

equitable gender relations within the Church.[82] The growing awareness of inequality and the lack of recognition of women also gave rise to protest within the internal channels of the ecclesiastical institution. In a revindicating tone, the editorial team of *Vida Nueva* stated in 1971 that women religious had been 'a bit – and pardon my saying so – the 'maids' of the Church, useful, very useful, praised, very praised in sermons and pastoral letters. But who, when, and how did we ever worry about their promotion?'[83] Indeed, as María Begoña Isusi and Julián López pointed out:

> The woman religious, as such, lacks within religious society a series of rights that women have achieved in civil society. Indeed, the woman religious finds herself in a position of inferiority compared to the contemporary woman, who enjoys increasing independence and equality with men.[84]

As the aforementioned Begoña Beristain wrote, 'the advancement of women is proceeding far too slowly in this century obsessed with speed. And it moves even more slowly within the Church'.[85] In this regard, women religious faced differential treatment not only in society and its structures but also within the very heart of the ecclesiastical institution. In 1972, Sister Blanca Prado criticised that women in society were 'in a position of inferiority compared to men, but what can we say if that woman is – in addition to being a woman – a nun?'[86] The following year, in another magazine, an anonymous author similarly denounced that 'women, and even more so if it is known they "smell like nuns", have very little influence'.[87]

As part of the growing awareness of their subordinate position within the ecclesiastical power structure, direct criticisms were voiced by women religious against a 'typically male Church-institution' in which they suffered 'male domination'.[88] As can be observed, the language was shaped by the slogans of feminism and its demands for equality between men and women. In fact, in 1970, the CER affirmed that it was essential 'to be sensitive to the influence of international currents advocating for women's equality and the recognition of their dignity beyond "conventionalisms"'.[89] In this way, some expanded the official discourse of 'women's advancement' towards more assertive and egalitarian positions. Generally, the term 'feminism' was not directly invoked, perhaps due to the discredit it suffered under the dictatorship and to avoid further risk of marginalisation within the Church.[90] Hence, some of the most committed women religious rejected – or rather, mostly avoided – self-identifying as feminists, even though their discourse upheld equality, challenged male dominance and at times employed explicitly feminist language.[91]

Be that as it may, second-wave feminism, along with other social movements inspired by the 'spirit of '68' and the culture of dissent of the 'long sixties', influenced the way these realities were understood as discriminatory and, consequently, the perceived need to combat them.[92] In this way, some women religious perceived the lack of recognition they faced due to their dual condition as women and consecrated individuals. This duality, which shaped their identity, led them to begin feeling discriminated against both in society and within the Church, prompting them not only to demand a voice but also to obtain representation and power within ecclesiastical bodies as well as in traditionally male roles such as the priesthood. During the 'long sixties', therefore, these demands intensified and experienced a 'long post-conciliar period' that coexisted with and confronted the new, conservatively oriented papacy of John Paul II after 1978.[93]

5 | Conclusion

The call for *aggiornamento* prompted a process of identity re-evaluation among Spanish women religious that was not without conflict. The National Catholic discourse, which exalted an ideal of womanhood centred on domesticity, regarded women religious as a homogeneous group with a supposedly unchanging identity. While the perception of women religious as childlike or minors was widespread internationally, the gender hierarchies underpinning the dictatorship gave particular emphasis to this model of subordination. Nevertheless, following Vatican II, women religious actively revised and challenged that representation, initiating a process of identity reconstruction that forms the central focus of this article. In this way, special emphasis has been placed on consecrated women's self-perception and agency.

As has been shown, not all Spanish women religious embraced the renewal with enthusiasm; some instead opted for immobility and the preservation of their traditional roles within the National Catholic context. There was, therefore, a mosaic of experiences shaped by multiple categories and a polyphony of voices surrounding their *aggiornamento*. However, this study has focused on those more progressive women religious who approached that moment dynamically. These women understood that their categorisation as 'childlike', 'noñas' or 'minors' did not reflect the reality of all, and they asserted their 'adulthood' as a necessary condition for renewal and constructing an identity aligned with new needs. In this regard, the CER played an important role in the transformation by fostering collective work oriented towards *aggiornamento*.

Without a direct reference point, yet maintaining a focus on the transnational circulation of ideas and changes among congregations in other countries, the most progressive women religious critically constructed their identities based on a counter-model to the prejudiced vision they sought to dismantle. In this way, they rejected the representation of childlike individuals and affirmed their status as adult women. Through the collective 'we', they developed a shared consciousness aimed at being recognised by society as 'new nuns': distinct from one another, yet dynamic and engaged with the issues of contemporary society. As a consequence, a new profile of the woman religious emerged as an adult and independent figure, one that delegitimised the gendered social order of Francoism. In other words, their identity shift often went hand in hand with a political stance distant from the dictatorial regime. Furthermore, as part of the Church, this transformation revealed the presence of dissident agents within the institution who discredited and did not support the dictatorship.

This critical attitude was shaped by the 'spirit of Vatican II' and by the influence of feminist demands framed within the culture of protest of the time. Thus, as women and consecrated, they

understood that the prevailing perception was largely attributable to the paternalism exercised over their communities. Indeed, this condescension had adverse effects on their human and professional development and limited them to subordinate roles within ecclesiastical structures. Consequently, they began to formulate criticisms of the hierarchical Church-institution, in which they lacked power and representation quotas. These demands, therefore, emerged in that particular context but transcended and resonated beyond the 'long sixties'.

Endnotes

[1] Giuseppe Alberigo, *Transizione epocale: Studi sul Concilio Vaticano II* (Il Mulino, 2009), 35.

[2] The term *women religious* generally refers to Catholic nuns and sisters who profess the three vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity and belong to a religious institute. Without entering into a detailed discussion, it is customary to distinguish between contemplative women religious—nuns—and active women religious—sisters. In practice, however, the terms are often used interchangeably. In this article, women religious therefore encompasses both groups.

[3] Joan Chittister, *Tal como éramos. Una historia de cambio y renovación* (Publicaciones Claretianas, 2006), 58.

[4] Many sociologists have proposed using the concept of 'identification' rather than 'identity'. Among them is the work of Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'", *Theory and Society* 29, no. 139 (2000): 66–85.

[5] We therefore start from a constructionist approach. See Manuel Pérez Ledesma, "La construcción de las identidades sociales," in *Identidades y memoria imaginada,* ed. Justo Beramendi and María Jesús Baz (Universitat de València, 2008), 19–41.

[6] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'", 6; Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?," in *Questions of Cultural Identities,* ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Sage, 1996), p. 4.

[7] Richard Jenkins, *Social identity* (Routledge, 2008), 42.

[8] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'", 15–16.

[9] Joan Wallach Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001), 285.

[10] Scott, "Fantasy Echo."

[11] An enlightening historiographical debate on concepts such as modernity, secularisation, religion and their interrelations can be found in Daniele Menozzi, Lucia Ceri, Mónica Moreno Seco, Javier Ramón Solans, "Investigaciones históricas e historia de la religión," *Ayer* 116, no. 4 (2019):327–56. See also Julio de la Cueva Merino, "Conflictiva secularización: sobre sociología, religión e historia," *Historia contemporánea* 51 (2015): 365–95.

[12] However, this perspective has been surpassed in recent years, and an increasing number of studies incorporate both categories. In this regard, a recent work can be consulted: Inmaculada Blasco Herranz, "Gendering Catholicism in Late Modern Spanish History (1854–1923): Research Lines and Debates for a European Dialogue," *European History Quarterly* 53 (2023): 233–53.

[13] Saba Mahmood, "Teoría feminista y el agente social dócil: algunas reflexiones sobre el renacimiento islámico en Egipto," *Papeles del CEIC* 2019, no. 1 (2019): 1–31; Spanish historiography has made significant progress in recent years in studying Catholicism from a gender perspective. Notable articles analysing the agency and identity of Spanish Catholic women during the twentieth century include: Inmaculada Blasco Herranz, "Identidad en movimiento: la acción de las 'católicas' en España (1856–1913)," *Historia y Política* 37 (2017): 27–56; Mónica Moreno Seco, "Cruce de identidades: masculinidad, feminidad, religión, clase y juventud en la JOC de los años sesenta," *Historia y Política* 37 (2017): 147–76 or Raúl Mínguez Blasco, "La religiosa conciliar en España: Una aproximación a su construcción identitaria en tiempos del Vaticano II," *Hispania Sacra* 75, no. 152 (2023): 473–84.

[14] Tine Van Osselaer, *The pious sex. Catholic constructions of masculinity and femininity in Belgium, c. 1800–1940* (Leuven University Press, 2013), 243.

[15] Arthur Marwick, "The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation," *The International History Review* 27, no. 4 (2005): 780–806; The choice to situate this study within the 'long sixties' aims to highlight the significance of the sociocultural and political transformation during these years and its impact on the Catholic world and, in this case, on the renewal of female religious life. In this regard, some authors have employed this periodisation, such as Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford University Press, 2015), and, more recently, Julio de la Cueva Merino and Joseba Louzao Villar eds., *Un 68 católico. Catolicismo e izquierda en los largos años sesenta* (Marcial Pons, 2023).

[16] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

[17] Pilar Salomón Chéliz, "Laicismo, género y religión: perspectivas historiográficas," *Ayer* 61, no. 1 (2006): 302–3; María Cruz Romeo Mateo and Nuria Tabanera García, *Católicos, reaccionarios y nacionalistas. Política e identidad nacional en Europa y América Latina contemporáneas* (Comares, 2021).

[18] Carolyn P. Boyd, "Introducción," in *Religión y política en la España contemporánea,* ed. Carolyn P. Boyd (Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2007), 4.

[19] Juan José Linz, "El uso religioso de la política y/o el uso político de la religión: la ideología-sucedáneo 'versus' la religión-sucedáneo," *REIS: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* 114 (2006): 19–26.

[20] Regarding National Catholicism, a fundamental work is that of Alfonso Botti, *Cielo y dinero: el nacionalcatolicismo en España (1881–1975)* (Alianza, 2008).

[21] On this subject, see: Claudio Hernández Burgos and César Rina Simón, "Restoring the Kingdom of Christ: The Appropriation of Religious and Cultural Festivals and the Construction of the Nation under Franco (1936–45)," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 25, no. 2 (2024): 149–70.

[22] Aurora Morcillo Gómez, *True Catholic Womanhood: Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[23] Mónica Moreno Seco, "Mujer y culturas políticas en el franquismo y en el antifranquismo," *Pasado y Memoria* 7 (2008): 167.

[24] Inmaculada Blasco Herranz, "Religión, género y mujeres en la historia contemporánea de España: un balance historiográfico," in *La historia religiosa de la España contemporánea: balance y perspectivas,* ed. Feliciano Montero, Julio de la Cueva and Joseba Louzao (Universidad de Alcalá, 2017), 270.

[25] Mónica Moreno Seco, "Mujeres, clericalismo y asociacionismo católico," in *Clericalismo y asociacionismo católico en España de la Restauración a la Transición: un siglo entre el palio y el consiliario,* ed. Ángel Luis López, Alfonso Botti and Julio de la Cueva (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2005), 110; Rebeca Arce Pinedo, "De la mujer social a la mujer azul: la reconstrucción de la feminidad por las derechas españolas durante el primer tercio del siglo XX," *Ayer* 57 (2005): 256; Blasco Herranz, "Religión, género y mujeres," 270; Maitane Ostolaza Esnal, "Género, religión y educación en la España contemporánea: estado de la cuestión y perspectivas historiográficas," in *Mujeres, hombres y catolicismo en la España contemporánea: Nuevas visiones desde la historia,* ed. Inmaculada Blasco (Tirant lo Blanch, 2018), 57.

[26] Mónica Moreno Seco, "Religiosas y laicas en el franquismo: entre la dictadura y la oposición," *Arenal* 12 (2005): 67–68; *Guía de la Iglesia en España* (Oficina General de Información y Estadística de la Iglesia, 1976), 44.

[27] Conferencia Española de Religiosas, *Guía de las comunidades religiosas femeninas de España* (Editorial CONFER, 1980), 591–601.

[28] On the role of Spanish women religious during National Catholicism, see: Verónica García-Martín, "Religiosas y el aggiornamento conciliar en España: hacia una renovación identitaria (1962–1965)," *Historia contemporánea* 71 (2023): 296–99.

[29] Regarding this term and its relevance during Francoism, see: Aurora Morcillo Gómez, *En cuerpo y alma: Ser mujer en tiempos de Franco* (Siglo XXI, 2015), 23–66. Also see Giuliana Di Febo, *La santa de la raza: Teresa de Ávila, un culto barroco en la España franquista (1937–1962)* (Icaria, 1988).

[30] As Ángela Atienza has shown, various actors – including the nuns themselves – exceeded the constraints prescribed at Trent and negotiated the terms and limits of enclosure. See, for example, her recent article: Ángela Atienza López, "La realización histórica de la clausura femenina en la Edad Moderna. Entre problemáticas, tensiones y consensos," *e-Spania* 48 (2024): https://doi.org/10.4000/120n3.

[31] Ángela Atienza López, "'No pueden ellos ver mejor… ': Autonomía, autoridad y sororidad en el gobierno de los claustros femeninos en la Edad Moderna," *Arenal* 26 (2019): 19–23.

[32] Lilí Álvarez wrote the foreword to the first Spanish edition of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1965, two years after its original publication in English.

[33] Lilí Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad* (Taurus, 1964), 46–52.

[34] Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad*, 46–47.

[35] Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad*, 47.

[36] M. Charles Borromeo, ed. *The New Nuns* (The New American Library, 1966), 2–4.

[37] Joseba Louzao Villar, "Nación y catolicismo en la España contemporánea. Revisitando una interrelación histórica," *Ayer* 90 (2013): 85.

[38] Fernando Sebastián Aguilar, "La Iglesia española a partir del Concilio," *Ecclesia*, 8 August, 1964, n. 1.204, 17.

[39] Joaquín Luis Ortega, "La España del Posconcilio," *Vida Nueva*, 11–18 October," 1975, n. 1000, 63.

[40] Carmen M. Mangion, *Catholic nuns and sisters in a secular age: Britain, 1945–1990* (Manchester University Press, 2020), 152–60.

[41] "El conflicto de las generaciones en las comunidades religiosas femeninas," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 408.

[42] *Gaudium et spes*, 44.

[43] Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican* II, 14.

[44] *Pacem in terris*, 39–45.

[45] The action and discourse of Spanish laywomen in the national and transnational spheres before Vatican II have been well studied, with particular attention to Catholic Action and its branches, as well as the figure of Pilar Bellosillo, later president of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO). To present some relevant works, the following may be mentioned: Mónica Moreno Seco, "De la caridad al compromiso: las mujeres de Acción Católica (1958–1968)," *Historia contemporánea* 26 (2003): 239–65; Mónica Moreno Seco, "Mujeres, trabajadoras y católicas: la HOACF en el franquismo," in *De la cruzada al desenganche: la Iglesia española entre el Franquismo y la Transición,* ed. Manuel Ortiz and Damián Madrid (Sílex, 2011), 133–60; Mónica Moreno Seco, "Jóvenes trabajadoras cristianas: compromiso social y aprendizaje ciudadano en la JOC," *Ayer* 102 (2016): 95–119; Celia Valiente Fernández, "Age and Feminist Activism: The Feminist Protest Within the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain," *Social Movement Studies* 14 (2015): 473–92; Ángela Pérez del Puerto, *Católicas de posguerra en acción: El discurso de género de Acción Católica en España y en Estados Unidos* (Comares, 2021); Inmaculada Blasco Herranz and Mónica Moreno Seco, "Españolas en el catolicismo internacional: la UMOFC, de la 'personalidad de la mujer' a la demanda de 'derechos inalienables'", in *Mas allá de los nacionalcatolicismos: redes transnacionales de los catolicismos hispánicos,* José Ramón Rodríguez and Natalia Núñez (Sílex, 2021), 391–420; Natalia Núñez Bargueño, "Recovering the Legacy of the Thought of Catholic Lay Women (1945–62)," *Journal of Modern and Contemporary Christianity* 2 (2023): 21–44.

[46] Mónica Moreno Seco, "Ideal femenino y protagonismo de las mujeres en las culturas políticas católicas del franquismo," *Arenal* 15 (2008): 269–93.

[47] Cited in Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures: Understanding Modern Societies,* ed. Stuart Hall, David Held and Anthony McGrew (The Open University, 1992), 275.

[48] Verónica García-Martín, "Crossroads of Identities in Women Religious in Spain: Catholicism, Society and Second Vatican Council (1953–69)," *Journal of Religious History* 47, no. 3 (2023): 469–85.

[49] Un equipo de religiosas, "La monja, ese extraño personaje," *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, December 1965: 69.

[50] The Spanish Conference of Religious (CONFER) was canonically established in 1953. Its primary purpose was to break the isolation of religious institutes by grouping and collaborating under a single organisational entity that collectively represented Spanish religious life. Later, in 1968, an independent section for nuns was created – the Spanish Conference of Women Religious (Conferencia Española de Religiosas, CER) – whose main objective was to represent female religious institutes 'before ecclesiastical and civil authorities, thus constituting a reference point for all matters affecting women religious in Spain'. For this latter reference, see *Estatutos de la Conferencia Española de Religiosas* (Héroes, 1969), art. 3, 7–8; "Carta de la nunciatura apostólica de España a Gerardo Escudero," Archive of the CONFER (henceforth AHCONF), 23 July 1963, unnumbered box [1–I–1965 – 30–X–1965], unnumbered file.

[51] *Sponsa Christi*, 31 32.

[52] AHCONF, 9 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 35.

[53] AHCONF, 7 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 39.

[54] AHCONF, 10 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 53.

[55] AHCONF, 13 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 77.

[56] AHCONF, August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file. 73.

[57] AHCONF, August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 68.

[58] AHCONF, 6 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 27.

[59] We retain the Spanish term *ñoño* – feminine: *ñoña* – as it was frequently used to refer to women religious. In this context, it is a pejorative adjective meaning excessively sentimental, childish, or lacking rationality, and was often employed to characterise women religious as overly emotional and lacking in rationality; AHCONF, 3 August 1963, unnumbered box [I–I–1963 – 27–VIII–1963], file 3.

[60] María Luisa Brey, "Nosotras las monjas, hoy," *Vida Nueva*, 6 May 1972, n. 831, 37.

[61] María Begoña Isusi and Julián López García, "¿Quiénes son? ¿Cómo viven? ¿Qué piensan las monjas españolas?," *Vida Nueva*, n. 656, 14 December, 1968, 19.

[62] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[63] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 42–43.

[64] Moreno Seco, "Religiosas y laicas en el franquismo," 75; Mínguez Blasco, "La religiosa conciliar en España," 483.

[65] "Soy una de tantas hermanas," *Yelda*, July–August 1973, n. 80, 32.

[66] María Teresa Ruiz Prados, "Nosotras… las monjas (?!)," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 403.

[67] Begoña Beristain, "La monja y el mundo actual," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 427.

[68] Beristain, "La monja y el mundo actual," 428.

[69] María Begoña Isusi, Report on 'El mundo actual: aspectos sociales', AHCONF, 1973, box 6903, unnumbered file [UISG–1973], 4.

[70] See, for example, Xavier Manzanet Moner, "La revolución de las monjas," *Vida Nueva*, 5 April 1975, n. 976, 38.

[71] Manuel de Unciti, "Las monjas del año 2000," *Vida Nueva*, 6 March 1971, n. 772, 21.

[72] Celestino Fernández, "Las monjas, esas desconocidas," *Yelda*, June 1978, n. 132, 31.

[73] Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad*, 37.

[74] "Resumen de la Asamblea General," AHCONF, 4–6 October 1968, box 6802, file 30.

[75] Pilar Moriones, "Nuestra renovación y sus dificultades. Punto de vista de una monja," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 414.

[76] *Perfectae caritatis*, 14.

[77] Un equipo de religiosas, "La monja, ese extraño personaje," *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, December 1965, 69, 70.

[78] Anonymous sister, "Conflictos generacionales," *Vida Religiosa*, 1 March 1970, vol. 28, n. 179, 266–67.

[79] Pilar Moriones, "Nuestra renovación y sus dificultades. Punto de vista de una monja," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 412.

[80] "Soy una de tantas hermanas," *Yelda*, July–August1973, n. 80, 33.

[81] Mínguez Blasco, "La religiosa conciliar en España," 479–80.

[82] Mónica Moreno Seco, "Mujeres en la transición de la Iglesia hacia la democracia: avances y dificultades," *Historia del presente*, 10 (2007): 30.

[83] "Las monjas: 'del cero al infinito'", *Vida Nueva*, 6 March, 1971, n. 772, 5.

[84] Julián López García and María Begoña Isusi, *Las religiosas en España* (Biblioteca Mensajero, 1968), 341.

[85] Begoña Beristain, "La monja y el mundo actual," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 428.

[86] Blanca Prado, "La hora de la perplejidad," *Yelda*, September 1972, n. 7, 24.

[87] M. C. H, "Las monjas pintan muy poco," *Vida Nueva*, 15 September, 1973, n. 898.

[88] María Teresa Arias, "¿Para qué ha servido el Vaticano II? (I)," *Vida Nueva*, 6 December 1975, n. 1007, 30; María Teresa Ruiz Prados, "Nosotras… las monjas (?!)," *Hechos y Dichos*, May 1967, n. 375, 401.

[89] CER, "Síntesis de una reflexión sobre el presente y expectativas de la vida religiosa en España," AHCONF (March 1970), box 7001, file 69.

[90] Eider de Dios Fernández, "Trabajadoras, ¿católicas?, ¿feministas? Las mujeres de la JOC en el tardofranquismo y la Transición," in *Mujeres, hombres y catolicismo en la España contemporánea: Nuevas visiones desde la historia,* ed. Inmaculada Blasco (Tirant Humanidades, 2018), 252.

[91] A similar phenomenon occurred in different contexts, as seen in Britain and Canada. However, the factor of the Franco dictatorship played a fundamental role in this omission of feminist identification. Regarding the contexts mentioned, see Mangion, *Catholic nuns and sisters in a secular* age, 230; Rosa Bruno-Jofré, Heidi MacDonald and Elizabeth M. Smyth, *Vatican II and Beyond: The Changing Mission and Identity of Canadian Women Religious* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 143.

[92] Horn, *The Spirit of '68*.

[93] On the agency of women within the ecclesiastical structure during the pontificate of John Paul II, see this recent study: Charles Mercier, "Breaking Through the Stained-Glass Ceiling During John Paul II's Pontificate? Women, Feminism and World Youth Days," *JoMaCC* 2, no. 1 (2023): 115–36.