

# Disputing the Public Sphere: Anticlerical Violence, Conflict and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, April 1931 – July 1936

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## RESUMEN

Los actos de violencia anticlerical e iconoclasta después de julio de 1936 reconfiguraron radicalmente las relaciones sociales y el paisaje físico en la zona republicana. Usando la destrucción del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús como enfoque analítico, este texto examina la conexión entre la lucha llevada a cabo por los obreros anticlericales entre abril de 1931 y julio de 1936 contra la presencia pública de la Iglesia católica, y la severidad y las formas de destrucción anticlerical durante la guerra civil.

**Palabras clave:** Violencia Anticlerical, Iconoclastia, Secularización, Espacio público, Acción colectiva.

Disputando la esfera pública: violencia anticlerical, conflictividad y el Sagrado  
Corazón de Jesús, abril de 1931 – julio de 1936

## ABSTRACT

In the months after July 1936, acts of anticlerical violence and iconoclasm underscored attempts to reconfigure radically social relations and the physical landscape in many parts of Republican Spain. Taking the destruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as its analytical focus, this text examines the connection between the grassroots battle waged by anticlerical workers against the Catholic Church's public presence during the peacetime Republican years, and the severity and forms of the war's anticlerical destruction.

**Key words:** Anticlerical Violence, Iconoclasm, Secularisation, Public Space, Collective Action.

**Summary:** Introduction. 1. Public Space, the Sacred Heart and Anticlerical Mentalities before 1931. 2. The Second Republic: Expectation and Confrontation. 2.1. Republicanising the Landscape. 2.2. The rites of passage. 2.3. Education. 3. February – July 1936: Radicalisation and Construction. 4. The Republic's Unfinished Business: Conclusions and Reflections.

## Introduction

*A friend of mine watched a man demolishing an image on the wall of a priest's house; above it was an inscription which he could not reach. It read: 'Now He shall reign.' He shook his mallet at it and said: 'So you think; but wait until I get a long ladder, and then we'll see.'* – John LANGDON DAVIES.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of August 1936, militiamen and women from across the province of Madrid assassinated the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The twenty eight metre tall statue, which stood imposingly on the Hill of Los Ángeles in Getafe, was destroyed over eight days using gimlets, drills, and eventually huge quantities of dynamite. During the iconoclastic dismantling process, 'Jesus' was 'executed by firing squad' on several occasions.<sup>2</sup> Two weeks earlier in Almeria, militiamen had reduced their Sacred Heart to rubble using shot holes, drills and firecrackers.<sup>3</sup> All across Republican Spain, in towns like Monteagudo (Murcia) and Aranjuez (Madrid), these towering stone figures were obliterated from the landscape.<sup>4</sup>

These episodes formed part of the wave of grassroots anticlerical violence unleashed in the zone of Spain which remained under the authority of the Republican Government following the military coup of 17-18 July 1936. During the first few months of the conflict, anticlerical workers set about wiping Catholicism from the public sphere, burning and destroying religious objects and parish archives. Mock processions using religious ornaments were frequent, as were the exhumation and exhibition of religious remains.<sup>5</sup> Gutted churches, emptied of Catholic symbols and religious meaning, were transformed into political headquarters, schools, cinemas, popular kitchens, barracks and hospitals.<sup>6</sup> Religious symbols were 'desacralised' and imbued with proletarian meaning; vestments became militiamen's uniforms and wooden saints were burned to cook food.<sup>7</sup> As is also well-known, this violence did not only target inanimate objects, but also religious personnel, resulting in the deaths of thousands of priests<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> LANGDON DAVIES, John: *Behind the Spanish Barricades*, London, Reportage Press, 2007, p.147.

<sup>2</sup> Archivo Histórico Nacional, Causa General (AHN, CG) legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/95; Archivo Militar de Madrid (AMM), Consejo de Guerra 52600/4766, María Arredondo Escribano; 3343/65138, Benito Alfaro Martin.

<sup>3</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/290; Archivo del Tribunal Togado Militar de Almería (ATTMA), Consejo de Guerra 305/1210, Manuel Palenzuela Cuerva.

<sup>4</sup> LINDO MARTÍNEZ, José Luis: "Acoso y Derribo al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en Aranjuez", en *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Históricos del Sur de Madrid 'Jiménez de Gregorio'*, Madrid, Universidad Carlos III, 2004, pp. 16-19.

<sup>5</sup> Archivo Diocesano de Madrid (ADM), Persecución Religiosa y Reorganización Diócesis (PRRD), Caja 4/3: *Culto* (numero provisional). All subsequent ADM references are to 'provisional numbers'.

<sup>6</sup> ADM, PRRD, Caja 4/3, *Relación de sacerdotes asesinados en Madrid durante el periodo de la dominación roja*; AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exps. 2/9, 2/287, 2/304, 2/369, 3/170.

<sup>7</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1853-3: Madrid, pieza No. 10, sumario núm. 60474.

<sup>8</sup> MONTERO MORENO, Antonio: *Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en España, 1936 – 1939*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961, p.762.

The immediate catalyst for this was the collapse of the Republican State provoked by a coup which divided the country. In most of urban Spain, the military rebels were defeated by loyal members of the security forces and the military and by workers armed by the Government. With the Republican forces of law and order dislocated, *de facto* power passed to these armed workers; weapons moved to the centre of public space. This drastic change in the structure of political opportunities provoked an atomisation of power on the Republican home front. Rural and urban workers, whose daily lives had been marked by the draconian public order practices of the Restoration Monarchy (1874-1923) and the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930), now found themselves in a radically new context which legitimised their own violent acts as a means of exacting change and eliminating enemies.<sup>9</sup>

Traditional readings of this popular anticlerical explosion – including accounts which are politically sympathetic to the Republic – have portrayed the acts as the aberrant work of ‘uncontrollable’ criminals.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation ignores the ways in which anticlerical violence at the beginning of the conflict constituted an attempt to affect an irreversible change in power relations in the public sphere, underlying efforts to construct a new society in many parts of Republican Spain. It also disconnects the violence from the forms of anticlericalism which were already emerging before the coup. This text will argue that anticlerical violence and iconoclasm at the beginning of the Civil War can only be understood in intimate connection with the battle to secularise public space underway during the peacetime Republican years. From April 1931 onwards, the mass democracy inaugurated by the Second Republic developed as a struggle between mass mobilised Catholicism on one hand, and a secularising Republic supported by (but also in constant tension with) anticlerical workers’ constituencies on the other. Many workers’ expectations were raised enormously by the new regime’s secularising intentions, only to be frustrated by the slowness and ineffectiveness of reform – something which was to a large degree the result of a simultaneous Catholic mass mobilisation.

Large numbers of anticlerical workers, faced with Catholicism’s ever-increasing public presence, positioned themselves at the vanguard of the secularisation of the street, carrying out grassroots anticlerical collective acts with the aim of shifting the balance of power in the public sphere away from these Catholic forces. Five years of struggle and frustration would generate an intensification of anticlerical sentiment among Spanish rural and urban workers, and an increased determination to secularise society from the bottom up. This paper will take as its analytical focus the battle to erase the Sacred Heart of Jesus – Spain’s symbol *par excellence* of the Church’s long-

<sup>9</sup> LEDESMA, José Luis: “Qué violencia para qué retaguardia o la República en guerra de 1936”, en *Ayer 76: Retaguardia y Cultura de Guerra, 1936-1939* (2010), pp.96-99; CASANOVA, Julián, *La Iglesia de Franco*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2005, p.174.

<sup>10</sup> See BAREA, Arturo: *La forja de un rebelde: la llama*, Barcelona, Random House, 2007, p. 147; THOMAS, Hugh: *La Guerra Civil Española*, Madrid, Rubión, 1979, p.104; CABANELLAS, Gabriel: *La Guerra de los mil días. Nacimiento, vida y muerte de la Segunda República: Volumen I*, Buenos Aires, Grijalbo, 1973, p.308. For a summary of these views, PÉREZ LEDESMA, Manuel, “Studies on Anticlericalism in Contemporary Spain”, *International Review of Social History* 46 (2001), pp.229-31.

standing, obdurate and reactionary claims upon public space - to demonstrate that the struggle for ownership of the public sphere which occurred from 1931 is a key factor in explaining both the severity and the forms of the Civil War's anticlerical violence.

## 1. Public Space, the Sacred Heart and Anticlerical Mentalities before 1931

By April 1931, statues and plaques dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus had already become a clear object of hatred for many rural and urban workers. In May 1919, in the aftermath of war and revolution across Europe and in the wake of the challenge to traditional social power that it signified, King Alfonso XIII had consecrated the country to the Sacred Heart, unveiling the colossal statue on the Hill of Los Ángeles, the geographical centre of Spain. The act was an elaborate public reaffirmation of the alliance between the Church and the Restoration Monarchy regime. It was also a symbol of the Church's ferocious rejection of pluralism and its conviction that the only viable Spanish national identity was a Catholic one. By the early twentieth century, the cult had become a symbol of reparation for damage caused to the Church by liberal secularising reforms. Acts of mass devotion dedicated to it were an integral component of the clergy's implacable crusade against the threat to its position posed by the burgeoning forces of liberalism, republicanism and leftwing political organisations. The consecration, attended by representatives of the Army and Civil Guard, was a bid to maintain social order by invoking divine backing for a regime increasingly besieged by working class political protest. In the years after 1919, town councils across Spain scrambled to erect their own Sacred Hearts. The inscription carved into the statues' bases insistently and gratefully reminded anticlerical workers of the 'Great Promise' made by Jesus to the Jesuit Bernardo de Hoyos in 1733: 'I will reign in Spain'<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> The full wording of this 'promise', of crucial importance within the shared Catholic imaginary of the period as it concerned the conception of the nation was: 'I will reign in Spain, and with more veneration than in other places.' *Boletín Oficial del Obispado de Madrid-Alcalá* (BOOM), Núm. 1,534, 16/05/1931, Tomo XLIV, Madrid, Imp. del Asilo del S.C de Jesús, 1931, p. 191; DI FEBO, Guiliana: *La Santa de la Raza: Un Culto Barroco en la España Franquista, 1937 – 1962*, Barcelona, Icaria, 1988, pp.51-3; CANO, Luis: *Reinar en España: la mentalidad católica a la llegada de la Segunda República*, Madrid, Encuentro, 2009, pp. 86-94; CHRISTIAN, William: *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 5,391,394; CRUZ, Rafael: *En el nombre del pueblo*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 2006, p.29. On 'reparation', monument building and consecration in France, the home of the cult, see JONAS, Raymond, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, pp.229-43. For a comprehensive overview of the cult's history and meaning, see MENOZZI, Daniele: *Sacro Cuore. Un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società*, Viella, Rome, 2002. The use of the Sacred Heart as a symbol of *desagravio* in the nineteenth century was a natural one. In 1673, Jesus had allegedly appeared before the cult's founder, Margarita María de Alcoque, with five glowing sores on his chest which opened to expose his heart. This symbolised his sadness that men 'did not value his love'. Jesus told her to start a cult of reparation. ÁLVAREZ CRUZ, Joaquín: *El Monumento al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en Bilbao*, Sevilla, Universidad de Sevilla, 2003, p. 6.

Spanish workers experienced this absolutism, ideological intolerance and Church-throne alliance on a daily level in many different ways. By the time 'Jesus' took his place on the Hill of Los Angeles in May 1919, many urban and rural workers were alienated entirely from the Church. In Spain's rural south, religion was rejected fiercely by the starving day labourers who worked on sprawling great estates owned by large landowners, enduring inhuman working conditions and seasonal unemployment. The Church's presence was negligible in the 'deep south', but workers only needed to take a cursory glance at who attended mass every Sunday to see all of the social sectors which oppressed them assembled in one place: the landowner who treated them as sub-human, the *cacique* who intimidated them into voting for the political parties of the Restoration Monarchy's corrupt *turno* system, and the Civil Guard who beat them for gathering acorns or firewood from estate land. Betrayed by a Church which had abandoned the poor, rural southern day labourers joined the burgeoning anarchist movement in staggering numbers.<sup>12</sup> Spanish anarchism, with its egalitarian ideal, millenarian rhetoric and Christian interpretive framework, became - at least to a certain degree - a kind of 'substitute religion' for many of its followers.<sup>13</sup> The anarchist perception of the Church as the 'antichrist' contrasted sharply with Catholicism's meaning among the smallholding peasantry of central and northern Spain. These small rural communities were closely bound - both spiritually and economically - to a Church which represented salvation and succour. While Catholic agricultural credit unions provided practical financial assistance, religious ritual marked the rhythm of daily life, defining and strengthening the community.<sup>14</sup>

For the rural and urban poor, the clergy's betrayal was also evident in the sumptuous wealth which the Church paraded endlessly before their eyes. Grandiose religious monuments like statues to the Sacred Heart, towering cathedrals and convents, and intensely dramatic public processions in which the riches of religious communities were carried through the streets must have seemed offensive to workers locked in a daily struggle to feed themselves and their families. Escape from the Church's physical presence was virtually impossible. Catholic funeral processions, endless streets named after religious figures and the 'multiple ringing of the bells of multiple bell towers' overwhelmed non-Catholic workers.<sup>15</sup> This 'popular claustrophobia' increased in correspondence with the Church's buoyant recovery from the liberal

<sup>12</sup> PRESTON, Paul: *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform Reaction and Revolution in the Second Spanish Republic 1931-1936*, London, Routledge, 1994, pp.101-2, 111, 134-5, 140, 148-9, 184-5.

<sup>13</sup> ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, José, *La ideología política del anarquismo español*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1976, pp.29-36, 204-14; BRENAN, Gerald: *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, pp.189-90; HOBBSAWM, Eric: *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 1959, pp. 77-84.

<sup>14</sup> GRAHAM, Helen: *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 4-5; MARTÍN BLÁZQUEZ, José: *I Helped to Build an Army: Civil War Memoirs of a Spanish Staff Officer*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1939, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> RADCLIFF, Pamela Beth: *From Mobilization to Civil War: The Politics of Polarization in the Spanish City of Gijón, 1900-1907*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 202; SERRANO, Carlos: "1900 o la difícil modernidad en España" en Carlos SERRANO and Serge SALAÜN (eds.): *1900 en España*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1991, p. 201.

reforms of the mid-nineteenth century (which had banned the male religious orders and sold their property). Under the institutional protection of the Restoration Monarchy, Catholicism's public presence became ever more pronounced. As previously proscribed orders were reconsolidated, and new ones were founded, convents, ever more monasteries and religious schools were constructed. Public displays of religious faith became increasingly common. For many anticlerical workers, the city streets seemed to reek of incense and piety.<sup>16</sup>

This emotional rejection of the Church's public hegemony was also linked to revulsion generated by the 'Catholic compass' which marked the private life processes of every citizen. Before 1931, divorce was illegal and civil marriage ceremonies were frequently blocked by priests. Non-religious zones of segregated cemeteries were indecorous and neglected by the same authorities that often prevented civil funeral processions from passing through the streets. This meant that through Catholic baptism, canonical marriage, last rites and funeral ceremonies, the Church enjoyed an inescapable monopoly upon life and death. The monopoly came at a price: the Church's sale of baptisms, marriages, holy communions and blessings effectively 'turned the altar into a bank' in the eyes of many workers.<sup>17</sup> Many men also resented the confessional, which they saw as a tool to interfere in their conjugal relations and spy upon their political activities.<sup>18</sup>

For many industrial workers, increasingly politicised and politically organised under the Socialist and anarchist trade unions (the UGT and the CNT), the Church's unshakable alliance with the rich and powerful was demonstrated by more than just its conspicuous wealth. Firstly, the Church was unashamedly linked to draconian public order practices of the Restoration Monarchy and of the subsequent Primo de Rivera dictatorship. In a potent reminder of the alliance between sabre and cross, workers subjected to arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention and torture by the Civil Guard saw

<sup>16</sup> *El Motín*, 05/01/1901; *La Revista Blanca*, 15/12/1903, No.132, p.364; LANNON, Frances: "The Social Praxis and Cultural Politics of Spanish Catholicism" in Helen GRAHAM and Jo LABANYI (eds.): *Spanish Cultural Studies An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.40; CASTRO ALFÍN, Demetrio, "Palabras de fuego: El anticlericalismo republicano", *Journal of Contemporary Spanish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2005), p.209; PENEDO COBO, Julio: "Implantación del clero en el Ensanche Norte durante la Restauración", en Ángel BAHAMONDE MAGRO and Luis Enrique OTERO CARVAJAL (eds.), *La sociedad madrileña durante la Restauración, 1876-1931*, Madrid, Consejería de Cultura, 1989, pp.251-65.

<sup>17</sup> CRUZ, Rafael: "El sabor fúnebre de la política española entre 1876 y 1940 en Jesús CASQUETE y Rafael CRUZ (eds.): *Políticas de la Muerte: Usos y Abusos del Ritual Fúnebre en la Europa del Siglo XX*, Madrid, Catarata, 2009, pp. 83 – 93; SALOMÓN CHÉLIZ, María Pilar: *Anticlericalismo en Aragón: Protesta y movilización política, 1900 – 1939*, Zaragoza, Universidad de Zaragoza, 2002, p.180.

<sup>18</sup> VINCENT, Mary: "The keys to the kingdom: Religious Violence in the Spanish Civil War, July-August 1936" in Chris EALHAM and Michael RICHARDS (eds.): *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.86; ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, José: "El Anticlericalismo en el Movimiento Obrero" en Gabriel JACKSON (ed.): *Octubre 1934: cincuenta años para la reflexión*, Madrid, Siglo XXI 1985, p.287 and *The Emergence of Mass Politics in Spain*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2001, pp.81-2.

these same agents of state-sanctioned repression parading proudly through the streets next to the priest during Holy Week or Corpus Christi.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, in a situation where the Church monopolised Spain's education system, charitable schools run by the religious orders instilled workers' children with the spiritual values which reinforced the Church-backed monarchical order: obedience to authority and the acceptance of social inequality. In order to benefit from Catholic charity, workers were required by priests to prove their religiosity and acceptance of these values. The clergy also staged charitable initiatives at election time to coerce workers into voting for rightist candidates. This was a deeply humiliating experience which generated a profound wellspring of anticlerical feeling.<sup>20</sup> Many urban workers saw the Church not just as an ally of the elites, but also as an exploitative employer. Anger was provoked by the unregulated working conditions which prevailed in educational and charitable centres, where those who attended them were used as cheap labour. Simultaneously, the productive activities of religious communities who sold goods made in convents at low prices and who did not pay taxes damaged workers economically, provoking fierce accusations of 'unfair competition'.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, workers experienced the Church's pertinacious opposition to political pluralism in increasingly forceful attempts by Catholic trade unions to drive a wedge in the organised labour movement. For workers affiliated to the UGT and the CNT, these unions – strongly linked to employers and engaged in continual strikebreaking – constituted the ultimate clerical treachery.<sup>22</sup> From the turn of the century onwards, politically organised workers collided regularly in the street with Catholic forces bent upon defending the Church's ideological hegemony. Faced with parliamentary debate over religious reform and the growth of populist Republican parties, the Church authorities formed a network of Catholic propagandistic organisations and lay associations that began to sow the seeds of an evangelical 'crusade' against progressive political forces. The efforts of organised Catholicism to increment Catholicism's public presence sparked a wave of anticlerical demonstrations aimed at challenging the Church's cultural, social and political hegemony by shifting the balance of power in the public sphere away from Catholic forces. In June and July 1899, a campaign by the ecclesiastical authorities and some conservative political sectors to place plaques

<sup>19</sup> EALHAM, Chris: *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona 1898 – 1937*, Oxon, Routledge/ Cañada Blanch, 2005, pp. 16-21.

<sup>20</sup> LANNON, Frances, "The Socio-Political Role of the Spanish Catholic Church: A Case Study", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1979), pp.199- 201; CALLAHAN, William James: *The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1998*, Catholic University of America Press, 2000, p. 323; PEIRATS, José: *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Volume II* (edited by Chris Ealham), Hastings, Christie Books, 2005, introduction, p. vi.; SALOMÓN CHÉLIZ, María Pilar: *Anticlericalismo...* p.86; BAREA, Arturo: *La Forja...*pp. 68-9.

<sup>21</sup> CONNELLY ULLMAN, Joan : *The Tragic Week: A Study of Anti-clericalism in Spain, 1875-1912*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press,1968; SALOMÓN CHÉLIZ, María Pilar *Anticlericalismo...* p. 84; LANNON, Frances, *Privilege, Persecution, and Prophecy: The Catholic Church in Spain 1875 – 1975*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> SHUBERT, Adrian "El Fracaso del Sindicalismo Católico en Asturias" en Gabriel JACKSON (ed.), *Octubre 1934...*pp. 246 – 48.

dedicated to the Sacred Heart on public buildings – a symbol which was by then strongly associated with all types of militant Catholicism and with ‘reparation’ for secular offences - was opposed by various municipal authorities. As Catholic manifestations of support for the politicised plaques were met head on with popular anticlerical demonstrations, the symbols of Catholicism and leftwing politics did battle in the street across Spain.

This anticlerical collective action, carried out by recently politicised workers who furiously opposed the political, cultural and social power of the Church, became a hallmark of the first decade of the twentieth century. The joint experience of this mobilisation, which mixed traditional repertoires of collective action like the stoning and burning of churches or assaults upon convents with modern ones like political meetings, petitions and demonstrations, was in itself crucial in the forging of anticlerical mentalities. The struggle, waged against Catholic groups who also mobilised using a combination of newer, political forms of collective action and elements of the Church’s traditional mobilisation repertoire (masses of reparation, processions and pilgrimages), foreshadowed - albeit on a much smaller scale – the Catholic and anticlerical mobilisation of the Republic.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. The Second Republic: Expectation and Confrontation

On 14 April 1931, a group of men – caught up in the popular jubilation which greeted the proclamation of the Second Republic – attempted to scale the monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Getafe in order to adorn it with a Phrygian hat and a Republican banner.<sup>24</sup> For many already anticlerical workers, the sudden disappearance of the monarchy and the coming to power of a Republican-Socialist provisional Government with secularising ambitions generated enormous excitement and expectation regarding religious reform. Yet this jocular attempt to superimpose the symbols of the new logic of the time upon such a colossal icon of Catholic hegemony could not conceal the vast cultural, social, economic and political power which the Church wielded at the dawn of the Republic. Republican reformers faced an immensely difficult task. Seeing the Church as the main obstacle to Spain’s modernisation, they sought to oust it from its privileged position at the ‘sacred centre’ of society.<sup>25</sup> Breaking the institution’s cultural power to diffuse the rites, conceptions and symbols which defined society was as important as limiting its enormous economic power and political influence. Radical and far reaching secularisation measures – most crucially in the

<sup>23</sup> DE LA CUEVA, Julio: “Clericalismo y anticlericalismo entre dos siglos: percepciones reciprocas” and SALOMÓN CHÉLIZ, María Pilar: “El Anticlericalismo en la Calle. Republicanismo, Populismo, Radicalismo y Protesta Popular (1898 – 1913)” in Julio DE LA CUEVA y Feliciano MONTERO (eds.): *La secularización Conflictiva: España 1898 – 1931*, Madrid, Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2007, pp.109-10, 126-133; DE LA CUEVA, Julio: “Movilización popular e identidad anticlerical 1898-1910”, *Ayer*, No. 27, (1997), pp.120-21.

<sup>24</sup> *Semanario Católico de Reus*, 6 June 1931, p.391 in CHRISTIAN, William: *Visionaries...*p. 469(n).

<sup>25</sup> HUNT, Lynn: *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 87.

educational sphere - would be the only means of eliminating the 'Catholic quality' of citizenship in order to craft a joint Republican national cultural identity.<sup>26</sup>

Yet from April 1931 onwards, an ever widening gulf developed between the secularising efforts of the Republican authorities and the battle for secularisation which increasingly politicised and ever more anticlerical workers fought on the street. From the outset, popular collective action ran far ahead of the Government's plans. For Republican politicians and anticlerical workers alike, the continued presence of symbols to the Sacred Heart was an inadmissible reminder of the Church's status as a pillar of the now defunct monarchical order and of its opposition to progressive politics. The symbols were also linked to the reactionary and widely resented Jesuit order, which would be dissolved by the Government in 1932. Without waiting for government action, workers took measures to expunge the Sacred Heart from the public sphere. In Purchil (Granada) local men affiliated to the UGT greeted the Republic's proclamation by attempting to rip plaques dedicated to cult from the walls and front doors of their neighbours' houses.<sup>27</sup> On 11 May 1931, the burning of religious buildings in Madrid corresponded to the same popular anxiety concerning the Church's links with monarchist political forces and impatience to find an immediate solution to the 'religious question'.<sup>28</sup> In Granada, the day after Madrid disturbances, a crowd of demonstrators forced its way into the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the Gran Vía with the flag of the Socialist *Casa del Pueblo* held aloft. People removed religious objects, burning them on a bonfire in the street. The adjoining Jesuit residence was sacked by workers who flung religious books, papers and garments from the windows.<sup>29</sup>

These grassroots attempts to tackle the Church in the public sphere, which took place before the Government had announced any secularising measures (and a full eight months before the secularising constitution was approved), demonstrate that the coming of the new regime raised huge and unrealistic expectations that the Republic would be able rapidly to shift power relations in the public sphere. In the following months, secularising legislation that directly affected peoples' daily experience of the Church had an even deeper impact. With the removal of crucifixes from state schoolrooms, the prohibition of the religious orders from teaching, the creation of secular

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<sup>26</sup> DELGADO, Manuel: *La ira sagrada: anticlericalismo, iconoclasia y antiritualismo en la España contemporánea*, Barcelona, Humanidades, 1992, pp.19-21 and "Violencia Anticlerical e Iconoclasta en la España contemporánea" in J. MUÑOZ, J.LEDESMA and J. RODRIGO (Coordinadores): *Culturas y Políticas de la Violencia España Siglo XX*, Madrid: Siete Mares, 2005, p.90. See also VILLAVERDE, Ángel Luis López: *El gorro frigio y la mitra frente a frente: construcción y diversidad territorial del conflicto político-religioso en la España republicana*, Barcelona, Rubeo, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 1009/40519, Antonio Ávila García.

<sup>28</sup> On church burnings in Madrid see *El Liberal*, 12 May 1931; *Ahora*, 12 May 1931; MONTERO MORENO, Antonio: *Historia...* p. 25; FERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA, Antonio: *Los Incendios de Iglesias de Mayo de 1931*, Madrid, Artes Graficas Municipales, 1999; MAURA, Miguel: *Así cayó Alfonso XIII*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1995, pp. 240 – 264.

<sup>29</sup> *El Defensor de Granada*, 12/04/1931, 13/04/1931; BARRIOS ROZÚA, Juan Manuel: *Iconoclasia 1930-1936, la ciudad de Dios frente a la modernidad*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 2007, pp.128-9.

cemeteries, and the legalisation of divorce and civil marriage, anticlerical workers saw the Church's hegemony in the private and public spheres finally contested – and their own freedom of action increased thereby.<sup>30</sup> Yet in the years that followed, this popular excitement ended time and time again in bitter frustration regarding the Church's undiminished public presence. As anticlerical workers became increasingly determined to resolve the problem on the street, jovial hats and banners gave way to mass demonstrations, stones, flames and firecrackers. In order to understand this evolution, two crucial and utterly interconnected factors must be taken into account: the vertiginous leftwing politicisation of Spanish workers and the mass political mobilisation of Catholics from April 1931 onwards.

Although the unionisation and politicisation of both urban and rural workers had been underway in Spain since the nineteenth century, with the coming of the Republic, workers could organise politically and take industrial action openly for the first time. In the case of the Socialist organisation, they were also represented in government. Belonging to the UGT, which now ran the nationwide system of labour arbitration boards (the *Jurados Mixtos*) was now viewed as necessary in many places to obtain work.<sup>31</sup> In this radically new political context, the ranks of workers' unions and political parties expanded vastly and rapidly in correspondence with people's expectations of the opportunities which the new regime could offer them. Young people also mobilised massively, many joining Republican, Socialist and Communist youth movements.

These newly mobilised workers were influenced by a political discourse which contained anticlerical ideas as a key tenet. Although the Socialist Party officially shunned anticlericalism as a bourgeois phenomenon which distracted workers from confronting the repressive capitalist order, its press nevertheless condemned the Church for its obscurantism and indoctrination of young minds. The anarchist CNT, whose political ideology dictated its absolute opposition to the bourgeois state represented by the Republic, was vociferously and unrelentingly anticlerical. The Socialist and anarchist press undoubtedly influenced union activists, but the most important way in which this politicisation contributed to the amplification and radicalisation of anticlerical mentalities was through association and socialisation. The anarchist *Ateneos* and Socialist *Casas del Pueblo* provided centres where workers shared their perceptions of the world, learning to identify themselves and each other in terms of common beliefs and shared perceptions. Anticlerical identity, which encompassed a wealth of different political ideologies, overlapping and melding with other collective identities, was an agglutinating element of the collective working class ideologies forged by association within communities.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> DE LA CUEVA, Julio: "El anticlericalismo en la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil" in Manuel SUÁREZ CORTINA y Emilio LA PARRA LÓPEZ (eds.): *El anticlericalismo español contemporáneo*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 1998, pp. 232 – 31.

<sup>31</sup> In Francoist military court records, workers' often claim they joined the UGT after 1931 'only to find work'. ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 382/11487, Emilio Gómez Camacho y otros

<sup>32</sup> ÁLVAREZ JUNCO: "El anticlericalismo obrero...", p.287.

Simultaneously, the Church began to use the new political framework to its advantage, mobilising its supporters politically against the Republic's secularising measures. During the spring and summer of 1931, the Ecclesiastical hierarchy started to develop a highly politicised discourse which portrayed the Church as a victim of persecution by a regime which had committed the 'extremely grave error' of 'confronting an authority which cannot renounce its divine mandate'. Bishops and priests urged Catholics to mobilise politically in defence of 'the rights of the Church'.<sup>33</sup> Those who answered the call were drawn from central and northern Spain's Catholic peasantry and provincial middle classes, and also from urban middling sectors and the newly radicalised Catholic Youth; they were united by an acute fear of change and the loss of a 'traditional' way of life based around religion. They lent their services to the already existent network of press organs, propagandistic organisations and associations of lay Catholics (the most important of which was *Acción Católica*) in unprecedented numbers.<sup>34</sup>

As Catholic groups began to use religious ritual for overtly political purposes, they were met head on in the street by anticlerical sabotage or counterdemonstration. The parallel mobilisation of these two 'blocs', and the conflictive dynamic into which they became locked, generated a struggle to control public spaces which underlay the making of mass democracy in Spain. Yet the anticlerical offensive was far more than a mere reaction to Catholic mobilisation (just as Catholic mobilisation was more than just a mere reaction to anticlerical mobilisation). It was simultaneously a grassroots attempt to implement the secularising reform which the Government seemed incapable of orchestrating (a fundamental reason for this incapacity being, of course, Catholic mobilisation). An examination of three key areas of Republican reform which spilled over into public battles – the 'republicanisation' of the landscape, the rites of passage and education – will reveal what Republican legislators attempted to do, why they failed in the eyes of many anticlerical workers, and how these sectors imposed their own grassroots solutions.

## 2.1. Republicanising the Landscape

In order to tackle the extravagant baroque dramaturgy of Catholic public ritual, Republican reformers passed a law stating that authorisation had to be obtained from the Interior Ministry for all Catholic public ceremonies.<sup>35</sup> Yet defensive action alone was not enough; the removal of the Church from the 'sacred centre' of society required the construction of a lay Republican 'centre' to supersede the Catholic one. As feast days and saints' days were declared ordinary working days, the Government spear-headed nationwide celebrations of May Day and the anniversary of the Republic's

<sup>33</sup> BOOM, 01/06/1932, Núm. 1,537, *Declaración colectiva de los Reverendísimos Prelados*, p.221; 01/08/1932, Núm. 1,588, 'Horas Graves', p.273

<sup>34</sup> GRAHAM, Helen: *Very Short History...*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>35</sup> *Constitución de la República Española*: Librería Miguel Hernández, Abril 1993; LANNON, Frances: *Privilege...* pp.190-1. The phrase 'extravagant dramaturgy' in VINCENT, Mary "The keys..." p.79.

proclamation on 14 April. In another prong of the strategy, religious or monarchical street names were changed by municipal authorities to commemorate the ‘new lay saints’ of the moment.<sup>36</sup> In Aranjuez (Ávila), the Town Council changed the name of the street which housed the town’s Sacred Heart of Jesus from *calle del Príncipe* (Prince Street) to *calle García Hernández* to commemorate one of the leaders of the failed Republican rising of December 1930 in Jaca. Municipal authorities also made attempts to remove religious statues from public places and erect ones to the Republic’s political and cultural icons.<sup>37</sup>

Many anticlerical workers, who had hoped that these measures would finally put an end to their Catholic induced collective claustrophobia, were left disappointed in several respects. Firstly, a mixture of Catholic opposition and Republican caution meant that relatively few religious monuments actually disappeared from the streets during the peacetime Republican years. The stony army of Sacred Hearts remained virtually intact. In Aranjuez (Madrid), Republican town councillors saw their scheme to remove the town’s Sacred Heart blocked in various legal channels by the parish priest throughout the entire peacetime Republican period.<sup>38</sup> In Bilbao, mass protests from Catholic and Basque Nationalist groups provoked the overturning of the Town Council’s decision to dismantle the city’s forty metre tall marble and stone giant.<sup>39</sup> In a situation where Catholic monuments continued to dominate the national landscape, the relatively few statues erected to Republican ‘heroes’ – like the statue to Pablo Iglesias constructed in Madrid’s *Parque del Oeste* – remained a minimal presence; a presence which only reached Spain’s large cities, leaving the provincial landscape unchanged.

These workers simultaneously faced a tremendously increased Catholic public presence. In the street - and on traditional religious stages and at symbolic centres like monuments, churches and hermitages - Catholic groups, committed to what one Salesian novice referred to as ‘burying of the flags of the wicked’, used religious ritual to defy Republicanism and secularisation. In a situation where public religious ritual was restricted by law and religious festivals had been removed from the official calendar, processions, holy retreats, festivals and open air masses were instantly imbued with political meaning. As ‘processions become demonstrations, pilgrimages become marches, and Sunday sermons become meetings’ across the country, the monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Getafe, already indelibly linked to ‘reparation’ for the sufferings of the Church at the hands progressive politicians, became the spiritual and physical centre of Catholic mobilisation.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the peacetime Republican years, legions of Catholics flocked to the Hill in ‘fervent and mass pil-

<sup>36</sup> The phrase is from ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, José: “El Anticlericalismo...”

<sup>37</sup> *ABC*, 05/01/1932, p.41.

<sup>38</sup> LINDO MARTÍNEZ, José Luis: “Acoso y Derribo...”, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *La Voz*, 05/01/1933, p.2; *ABC*, 10/03/1933, 17/02/1933 p.17, *La Vanguardia*, 14/02/1933, p.4, 25/02/1933, p. 2, 23/02/1933, p. 2, 15/03/1933, p.11 ,20/05/1933, p.21.

<sup>40</sup> CRUZ, Rafael: *En el nombre...*, pp. 47-62; RADCLIFF, Pamela Beth: *From Mobilization...*, pp. 201 – 225; ADM, PRRD, Caja 7, *Proceso de Martirio de los Salesianos: Cartas Personales: Don Justo Juanes Santos*, 12/05/1931.

grimage' to pray for Spain's salvation, encouraged to do so by priests, bishops and lay associations. While Catholic mobilisation was funded by the wealthy social sectors which backed the Church, the Republic – struggling to pay off the debts of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in a period of worldwide economic depression – was unable to stage state sponsored celebrations capable of competing with the Catholic ritual. Republican politicians' reluctance to encourage their supporters to take to the streets further contributed to a situation in which anticlerical workers saw Catholicism's (now acutely political) public presence eclipsing that of the Republic.<sup>41</sup>

On a local level, people developed various strategies to tackle an ever worsening problem which the Republic seemed incapable of solving. The sabotage of Catholic shows of strength was the most direct tactic. In Huéscar (Granada) in March 1932, a group of local leftists sabotaged a procession to the town's patron saints. Taking advantage of a common custom by which the faithful 'dispute the ownership of the saints', they seized the statues and carried them to the Catholic Agrarian Centre in a mocking procession. In the ensuing disturbances between Catholics and anticlericals, several of the images were damaged. The following year, before the festival of the Sacred Heart in June, the clergy and devotional associations instructed Catholics to adorn their balconies with hangings dedicated to the cult. Across Spain, protesters stoned houses bearing the symbols, pulling down and destroying their banners.<sup>42</sup>

In cities, towns and villages across Spain, workers also staged political demonstrations and lay counter rituals, both to confront Catholicism in the public sphere and to establish the foundations of a projected secular society. In Cuevas de los Medinas, an extremely poor community of just sixty inhabitants nineteen kilometres from the city of Almería, female inhabitants led a comprehensive anticlerical campaign against the parish priest in the months preceding the February 1936 elections. Threats, 'mini insurrections', demonstrations and 'endless propaganda against religion' rendered him practically unable to celebrate acts of worship and 'carry out the normal functions of the Church'.<sup>43</sup> In Pechina, also in Almería, local leftists developed a tradition of gathering near to the parish church to cook and eat a lamb on Good Friday, publicly

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<sup>41</sup> BOOM, Núm. 1,534, 16/05/1931, p. 191; Núm. 1,561, 10/06/1932, *Nueva Junta del Cerro de los Ángeles*, pp. 213-214; On the effective failure of attempts to construct this republican 'centre', and the enduring power of the Catholic ritual order, see RADCLIFF, Pamela Beth: *From Mobilization...*, pp. 201 – 225; RADCLIFF, Pamela: "La representación de la nación. El conflicto en torno a la identidad nacional y las practicas simbólicas en la Segunda República" in Rafael CRUZ and Manuel PÉREZ LEDESMA: *Cultura y movilización en la España contemporánea*, Madrid, Alianza, 1997, pp.312-25; DE DIEGO ROMERO, Javier: "Ciudadanía católica y ciudadanía laica (II): de la tolerancia a la libertad religiosa" and CRUZ, Rafael: "La voz del pueblo suena como las trompetas del juicio. Identidades, control policial y derechos de ciudadanía en la Segunda Republica" in PÉREZ LEDESMA, Manuel (dir.): *De súbditos a ciudadanos. Una historia de la ciudadanía en España*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2007, pp.251-76, 277-310.

<sup>42</sup> KODASVER: *Medio siglo de la vida diocesana matritense* (Tall. Aldus, Madrid 1967), pp.199-110; HERNÁNDEZ FIGUEIREDO, José Ramón: *Destrucción del patrimonio religioso en la II República (1931-1936)*, Madrid, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2009, p.47.

<sup>43</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/220.

demonstrating their atheism and transgression of Catholic ‘rules’ while simultaneously forging an alternative kind of community bond.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.2. The rites of passage

The Republic’s attempts to disable the ‘Catholic compass’ which until 1931 had controlled the most intimate life processes of every individual, centred upon the introduction of civil marriage and divorce and the secularisation of the cemeteries.<sup>45</sup> Anticlerical workers derived a new sense of freedom from these reforms. However, the response of politically mobilised Catholics again saw religious ritual used as a political tool. In the case of the cemeteries, Republican authorities generally succeeded in creating secular municipal cemeteries in localities, so that Catholic and secular cemeteries existed side by side. In Almería, for example, the Republican councillor and future mayor, Antonio Ortiz Estrella, visited the main cemetery shortly after the Republic’s proclamation, delivering an impassioned speech proclaiming ‘equality among the dead’ and calling for the segregating wall to be demolished. His orders were later carried out to the letter in accordance with the January 1932 Law of Cemeteries.<sup>46</sup> However, cases where parish cemeteries were expropriated in order to transform them into municipal ones (authorised in certain circumstances under the Law of Cemeteries) were more complicated. Parish priests, backed by their mobilised parishioners and fully informed by the Ecclesiastical authorities of ‘the procedure which must be followed against unjust seizures,’ challenged expropriations in provincial courts across Spain. They frequently obtained rulings in their favour.<sup>47</sup>

Funeral processions, which required permission from the Interior Ministry, similarly became a means of challenging the Republic’s authority.<sup>48</sup> After April 1931, there occurred numerous examples of priests refusing to recognise the new legal situation and attempting to impose Catholic rites of passage upon anticlericals and non-Catholics. In December 1932, the President of the Republican Radical Socialist Association of Caparros (Navarre) protested to the Civil Governor regarding the burial of Laureano Bozal Caballero, a Republican activist ‘known in all of Navarre for his lay beliefs.’ The telegram alleged that Catholic members of Bozal Caballero’s family, in collusion with the local priest, had taken advantage of the absence of a will to give him a Catholic burial – something which was entirely offensive to his fundamental beliefs.<sup>49</sup> In May 1932, riots erupted in the town of Villarrubia de Santiago (Toledo) when news spread that a young girl, who had been named three months earlier in a

<sup>44</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1164-1, Almería, exp. 2/478.

<sup>45</sup> LANNON, Frances: *Privilege...*, p. 190-1; *Constitución de la República Española*; BOOM, Núm. 1,555, 15/03/1932, *Ley sobre los cementerios*, pp. 117 – 118.

<sup>46</sup> ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 250/12270, Antonio Ortiz Estrella; AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/382.

<sup>47</sup> BOOM, Núm. 1571, 01/10/1932, *Sobre incautación de cementerios*, p.380-1; Núm. 1,635, 16/07/1935, *Disposiciones del Poder Civil*, p.294.

<sup>48</sup> For examples of Catholics seeking authorisation for funerals see AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/8/10 (Navarra).

secular celebration, had been taken to the parish church against her parents' wishes (the Interior Ministry document does not reveal by whom) and baptised. The priest, aware that he had contravened the girl's parents' wishes, presented himself voluntarily at the jail, where he was imprisoned to save him from the crowd that gathered to protest.<sup>50</sup>

Workers took measures locally to confront the politicisation of the rites of passage. Blocking Catholic funeral processions was one tactic. In October 1932, in Fuente Ovejuna (Córdoba), the despairing Civil Governor communicated to the Interior Ministry that in the village of Cardencho, the burial of a Catholic woman who had died three days earlier was being obstructed by villagers who would not tolerate the presence of priests at the funeral, or the public transferral of the body to the cemetery.<sup>51</sup> In many places, leftist town councils attempted to reduce the public presence of the Church during funeral processions to a bare minimum. In Pechina (Almería), burials officiated by priests were officially prohibited by the local authorities from 1932. Funeral corteges could, however, pass hurriedly in front of the church, whereupon the priest emerged to bless the mortal remains 'for the amount of time strictly necessary.'<sup>52</sup> Simultaneously, workers transformed the funeral ceremonies of their friends, family members and political comrades into statements of political belief and defiance of mobilised Catholicism. In Perales de Tajuña (Madrid), the parish priest reported that during the Republican period, the town's leftists began to stage funeral processions complete with red flags and political symbols, honouring the dead with the clenched fist salute.<sup>53</sup> Funeral processions like this became a prominent feature of the post-February 1936 Popular Front period. For leftwing militants, they were a powerful collective means of affirming the 'revolutionary memory' of comrades who had died in street violence provoked by rightwing groups or at the hands of the security forces<sup>54</sup>.

### 2.3. Education

The other chief means by which the Church exercised its hegemony in the private sphere before 1931 was through Catholic education. For reforming politicians like Manuel Azaña, the secularisation of the education system was a 'matter of public health'; the only way to forge a new generation of Republicans educated in the virtues of science and reason and free of the 'obscurantism' of Catholic teaching. For this reason, religious symbols were removed from state schoolrooms in May 1931. In December, the constitution reinforced this symbolic ousting of the Church from the

<sup>50</sup> AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/7 (Toledo).

<sup>51</sup> AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/8/4 (Córdoba).

<sup>52</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1164-1, Almería, exp. 2/478.

<sup>53</sup> ADM, PRRD, Caja 6, *Perales de Tajuña*.

<sup>54</sup> CRUZ, Rafael: "El sabor fúnebre..." pp. 91-8; BUNK, Brian D.: "Your Comrades will not Forget": Revolutionary Memory and the Breakdown of the Spanish Second Republic, 1934-1936" in *History and Memory*, 14, 1-2, 2002.

educational sector by announcing the intention to ban religious orders from teaching<sup>55</sup>. These actions, combined with the Republic's much stated aim of creating a national system of lay primary education (the aspiration being a public school teacher and schoolroom in every village), engendered a shared hope among many workers that their children would be freed from religious teaching based on ideas of subservience and acceptance of inequality.

However, the spark ignited by this reform soon mixed with frustration generated by the practical ineffectiveness of the measures. Firstly, the Republic's financial limitations coupled with a shortage of trained personnel meant that secularising legislation was applied patchily and inefficiently. Secondly, the religious orders involved in teaching frequently managed to circumvent the prohibitions, transferring ownership of their schools to lay hands and continuing to teach in civilian clothes. Thirdly, the legislation, combined with the highly emotive issue of the removal of crucifixes from state schoolrooms, hugely fomented Catholic mobilisation. During 1931 and 1932 demonstrations led by Catholic groups demanding the return of the crucifixes and the restoration of Catholic teaching thronged the streets of towns and cities across Spain. They were frequently led by women, who mobilised tremendously across the country during the Republican period under the auspices of the Catholic associational movement.<sup>56</sup> In Burgo de Osma (Soria), for example, a group of local women burst into the town hall in January 1932, interrupting a session of the town council to demand the return of the crucifixes to the town's classrooms.<sup>57</sup>

The legislation also led to a flurry of more practical activity on the part of lay associations. The *Cruzados de la Enseñanza* (Crusaders of Teaching), for example, was formed in August 1933 to 'take care of the sustaining and the multiplication of Catholic primary schools' in order to 'save Catholic teaching from the deadly blow which its enemies wish to deal out to it.'<sup>58</sup> By March 1934, these 'crusaders' controlled 116 primary schools and had opened 37 new ones in the diocese of Madrid-Alcalá alone.<sup>59</sup> This combination of Catholic opposition and Republican financial limitations combined with the coming to power of a conservative and counter-reforming Republican government in November 1933 to ensure that the religious orders remained a very strong presence in the educational system throughout the peacetime Republican years.

For anticlerical workers, Catholic presence in education – like the Church's general public presence – actually seemed to be increasing under the Republic. This paradox explains the vehemence of the anticlerical dimension during the revolutionary rising in Asturias in October 1934. The rising was sparked by a perceived 'legal

<sup>55</sup> RAGUER, Hilari: *Gunpowder and Incense: The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War*, London and New York, Routledge/Canada Blanch, 2007, p.17; LANNON, Frances: *Privilege...*, pp. 184-91; *Constitución de la Republica Española*.

<sup>56</sup> Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/7 (Toledo); AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/8 (Sevilla).

<sup>57</sup> AHN, Interior A, legajo 53<sup>a</sup>/3 (Soria).

<sup>58</sup> BOOM, Núm. 1,588, 01/08/1933 *Las escuelas católicas*, pp.285-8; Núm. 1,590, *Exhortación pastoral acerca de la enseñanza*, p.305.

<sup>59</sup> BOOM, Núm. 1,603, 15/03/1934, *Inauguración de dos escuelas católicas*, p.105; Núm. 1,605, 16/04/1934, *Inauguración de escuelas*, p.142.

coup' against Republican reform: the entry of Catholic Party (CEDA) ministers to the three most sensitive cabinet posts (Labour; Justice and Agriculture). The CEDA, characterised by the explosive mixture of religious and quasi-fascist rhetoric employed by its leader José María Gil Robles, was fervently supported by the Catholic associational movement. In a European context marked by the gradual crushing of the left by rightwing authoritarian or fascist regimes, the CEDA (along with its youth group, the JAP) was seen by many on the left as a Church-endorsed fascist threat. Many industrial workers, increasingly convinced that their principal enemy was 'Vaticanist fascism', were similarly horrified by the Church's redoubled attempts to sabotage the anarchist and Socialist unions by strikebreaking and the fomenting of yellow unionism.<sup>60</sup>

During the Asturian rising, which saw the killing of 34 religious personnel and the destruction of 58 religious buildings, religious personnel still involved in teaching were pursued furiously and eight Brothers of the Christian Doctrine were killed in Turón, where they had run schools where miners' children were taught in the traditional mode to defer to the 'people of order'.<sup>61</sup> In May 1936, when rumours that nuns were distributing poisoned sweets to workers' children, sparked multiple attacks upon church property in popular districts of Madrid, the majority of buildings assaulted and set on fire were religious schools. Most of the institutions administered free education to workers' children, and all of them had escaped entirely Republican educational legislation.<sup>62</sup> The rhetoric of the crowd during the events demonstrates the extent to which the Republic's bid to create a secular national education system had entered into popular anticlerical mentalities. Outside the school of *María Auxiliadora* in Cuatro Caminos, a spokesman explained to the director that 'as the Republic needs hygienic, clean places for its schools, the group has come to take possession.'<sup>63</sup>

### 3. February – July 1936: Radicalisation and Construction

These acts of sabotage and counter mobilisation reveal that the forms of anticlerical collective action - such as the sabotage of religious processions or the destruction of religious

<sup>60</sup> AHN, Interior A, legajo 5<sup>a</sup>/5 (Madrid); AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/76; The term *fascismo vaticanista* was employed by the leftwing press and leftwing activists during the Civil War and the later peacetime Republican period to describe the 'bloc' formed by Catholic and reactionary rightwing forces. See ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 19012/430 Enrique Juan Escobar Benavente; PEIRATS, José, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, Volume One, edited by Chris Ealham, Hastings, the Meltzer Press, 2001, p. 148; ÁLVAREZ TARDIO, Manuel: *Anticlericalismo y Libertad de Conciencia*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Políticas y Constitucionales, 2002, pp.230.

<sup>61</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/76; ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 19012/430 Enrique Juan Escobar Benavente; CALLAHAN, William James: *The Catholic Church...*, pp. 321-23; MONTERO MORENO, Antonio, *Historia...*pp.41-45.

<sup>62</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1514: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 31/13; Archivo Secreto Vaticano (ASV) *Informe del obispo de Madrid-Alcalá a Tedeschini sobre los desmanes religiosos* (Madrid, 01/06/1936), ASV, busta 967, fasc. 1, f.100-104 in HERNÁNDEZ FIGUEIREDO, José Ramón: *Destrucción...*p. 290.

<sup>63</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/323.

property and symbols - remained consistent throughout the Republican years. However, the meanings and goals which its protagonists attached to their actions did not. By the February 1936 elections, anticlerical mentalities had hardened enormously among workers; acts of anticlerical violence were becoming ever more fiercely political. This change was the result of the intense battle which had been underway since 1931 against organised, politicised Catholicism in the public sphere. Now, after over two years of conservative Catholic-backed government, during which reformist labour legislation had been overturned and the Church had been given a free rein to make its physical presence felt in the street, the return to power of a Government with a reforming will generated an 'explosion' of popular expectation. On a local level, people who had endured years of frustration regarding the slowness and ineffectiveness of secularising reform began to pre-empt Government action, taking matters into their own hands on an unprecedented level.

As leftwing town councils began to govern, power relations on a local level were turned upside down and anticlerical collective action accelerated.<sup>64</sup> On one hand, popular anticlerical attempts to 'reconquer' the public space during the Popular Front period were a clear reaction to the by now embedded association between clericalism and what many workers interpreted as the 'fascism' of the CEDA. In Portelárbol de la Sierra (Soria), local people entered the town's hermitage in June 1936, burning the images within it and writing 'Death to Gil Robles! Down with the clergy!' on its blackened walls.<sup>65</sup> Between February and July 1936, anticlerical violence arose as a clear response to fear of a fascist takeover; churches were frequently burned in Spain's cities following provocation by the Falange (the Spanish fascist party, towards which the CEDA youth militants of JAP were now gravitating in huge numbers).<sup>66</sup> In Valladolid, leftwing unions called a general strike in June 1936 to coincide with the festival of the Sacred Heart.<sup>67</sup> By 1936, Valladolid was an important nucleus of fascist mobilisation. It was also the 'chosen city' of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a centre of militant Catholicism.<sup>68</sup> Leftwing militants, who convoked the work stoppage as a protest over growing Falangist violence in the city, evidently saw the two issues as being tightly intertwined. In May 1936, during the fiery days of the poisoned sweets, crowd members remonstrated against the 'fascist clerical swine'<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, Eduardo: "La dialéctica de las pistolas. La violencia y la fragmentación del poder político durante la Segunda República" en J. MUÑOZ, J. L. LEDESMA and J. RODRIGO (coordinadores): *Culturas y Políticas de la Violencia...* pp.137-8.

<sup>65</sup> ASV, *Informe del obispo de Burgo de Osma a Tedeschini* (Burgo de Osma, 12/06/1936), busta 967, fasc. 1, f.185.

<sup>66</sup> MONTERO MORENO, Antonio: *Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en España*, p.25.

<sup>67</sup> *El Debate*, 21/06/1936; CRUZ, Rafael, *En el nombre...*, pp.29-30

<sup>68</sup> Valladolid was the city where Jesus supposedly made the 'Great Promise' to the Jesuit Bernado de Hoyos; this made it a key spiritual centre of the cult. The Church of San Ambrosio, site of the vision, would be consecrated and inaugurated in June 1941 as the *Santuario Nacional de la Gran Promesa* (National Sanctuary of the Great Promise) following the victory of the insurgents in the Spanish Civil War. Described by the Catholic magazine *Reinaré en España* as 'the headquarters of the Lord and Generalísimo of the armies of heaven and earth', it would become a potent symbol of the Church's alliance with the Francoist dictatorship. DI FEBBO, Guiliana: *La Santa de la Raza...*, pp.57-59.

<sup>69</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1514: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 31/60; AHN, CG legajo 1514: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 31/2, 31/56; AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/195.

Most importantly, however, acts like these constituted a constructive attempt to tackle the still unsolved problem of the Church's public presence. The apparent aim of the crowd during the case of the poisoned sweets was the seizure of religious institutions and their conversion into 'clean and hygienic' secular schools.<sup>70</sup> The objective of repossessing Catholic spaces and converting them into institutions which would serve the workers rarely came to fruition in the spring of 1936 because anticlerical protagonists were still for the most part limited by the Republican State's control of the forces of coercion. However, it was during the post February 1936 period of new reform-oriented Republican government that the first glimpses emerged of anticlerical violence being used as a tool in the making of a projected 'new society'. In March, the Bishop of Cartagena reported to the Papal Nuncio that those who carried out acts of anticlerical violence in his diocese: 'Now have the tactic of taking all of the religious items to the plaza or the road...they burn them in a bonfire leaving the building for other uses which they think appropriate.'<sup>71</sup> In Arévalo (Ávila), the parish church was 'opened violently' and occupied by men affiliated to the *Casa del Pueblo* in March 1936.<sup>72</sup> In Rozas del Puerto Real (Madrid), local men seized the rectory in April, hanging a huge red flag from it and declaring that it was the new *Casa del Pueblo*.<sup>73</sup>

During the spring of 1936, the practice of burning a town's parish archive and its property registers along with its religious buildings also made its first widespread appearance. From Cehegín in Murcia, Elche in Alicante, Yecla in Cartagena – and a multitude of other towns and villages across Spain – priests reported to bishops that records of property ownership and Catholic-regulated births, deaths and marriages had been reduced to ashes by local people.<sup>74</sup> This burning was a highly symbolic and public attempt to break with the 'cramping bonds of the past' and create a new society free of repression and tyranny – a repression and tyranny legitimised and propped up by the clergy. After 17-18 July 1936, the radical fragmentation of power across the Republican zone allowed the protagonists of anticlerical violence to contemplate the complete obliteration of the Church from the public sphere and the construction of new world which 'rejoiced in the overthrow of the old' in a way which had never been possible before.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/323.

<sup>71</sup> ASV, *Informe del obispo de Cartagena a Tedeschini* (Cartagena, 17/03/1936) busta 945, tit. VIII, rub. I, sez. IV, n.1, f.95.

<sup>72</sup> ASV, *Informe del obispo de Ávila a Tedeschini* (Ávila, 24/03/1936), busta 945, tit. VIII, rub. I, sez. IV, n.1, f.410

<sup>73</sup> ADM, PRRD, Caja 6; *Rozas de Puerto Real; Informe del obispo de Madrid-Alcalá a Tedeschini* (Madrid, 02/04/1936), ASV, busta 945, tit. VIII, rub. I, sez. IV, n.1, f.476

<sup>74</sup> ASV, *Informe de un testigo presencial dirigido al obispo de Cartagena* (Yecla, 18/03/1936), busta 945, tit. VIII, rub. I, sez. IV, n.1, f.476; *Informe del A.A de Orihuela al nuncio* (Orihuela, 03/03/1936), busta 912, tit. V, rub. III, n.77, f.569-571; *Informe del obispo de Cartagena a Tedeschini* (Cartagena, 17/03/1936), busta 945, tit. VIII, rub. I, sez. IV, n.1, f.95

<sup>75</sup> LEDESMA, José Luis: "La santa ira popular" del 36: La violencia en guerra civil y revolución, entre cultura y política in J. MUÑOZ, J. L. LEDESMA and J. RODRIGO (Coordinadores): *Culturas y Políticas...*, pp.137-8; LINCOLN, Bruce: "Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.27, No.2, Cambridge University Press, April 1985, p. 260.

#### 4. The Republic's Unfinished Business: Conclusions and Reflections

On 22 July 1936, four days after the military rebellion, Aranjuez's Sacred Heart of Jesus met the fate that it had avoided during the peacetime Republican years. Local men, directed by the Republican councillors who had spent five years attempting to remove the monument by legal means, tore it down using wires, ropes and a cart tethered to a mule. When the statue hit the ground and shattered, they seized its head and threw it into the river.<sup>76</sup> In Almería, where the town council had blocked a vote to remove the city's monument to the Sacred Heart after the February elections, local militiamen blew it up on 25 July.<sup>77</sup> Across Spain, images of the Sacred Heart were burned, smashed to pieces with pickaxes, hurled from balconies or publicly 'executed by firing squad'.<sup>78</sup> In Getafe, following the destruction of the most symbolic statue of all, the Hill of Los Ángeles was renamed the 'Red Hill'; the mayor of Getafe proposed that church bells be melted down across Spain to construct a monument to the 'heroic achievement' of the militias who had defeated the military coup.<sup>79</sup>

The forms of anticlerical violence which marked the summer and autumn of 1936 were strongly influenced by the struggle to secularise the rites of passage which had unfolded between 1931 and 1936. Mock processions had long formed a part of a common repertoire of anticlerical collective action; they were a clear demonstration of the way in which many anticlericals had subconsciously internalised the 'extravagant dramaturgy' of Catholic public ritual.<sup>80</sup> Between 1931 and 1936, Catholic use of ritual to resist secularising legislation meant that the carnival-esque mockery of Catholic rites became a widespread, politicised tactic of counter mobilisation. After July 1936, Catholic marriage and baptism were targeted mercilessly by militiamen who carried out satirical wedding ceremonies, tried to persuade captured chaplains to marry nuns, or orchestrated pantomime style baptisms using plastic dolls. For the protagonists, these parodies were the final, fearless crushing of a 'Catholic compass' turned political weapon which the Republic had been unable to disable.<sup>81</sup>

Most importantly, the all embracing destruction of the external manifestations of Catholicism which took place following the coup corresponded to an anxiety among workers to desacralise public spaces which had become increasingly acute between 1931 and 1936. Republican reforms had ignited an eagerness for change which had left anticlerical workers frustrated when the Church's public presence in-

<sup>76</sup> LINDO MARTÍNEZ, José Luis: *Acoso y derribo...*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>77</sup> ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 305/1210, Manuel Palenzuela Cuerva; AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 3/290; ÁGUILERA GOMEZ: Ángel *La Historia Silenciada, 1930 – 1989*, Almería: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 1999, pp. 110-12, 122-23.

<sup>78</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/157; DE CASTRO ALBARRÁN: *La gran víctima. La Iglesia española mártir de la revolución roja*, Salamanca, Edit. Nacional, 1940, pp.146-7.

<sup>79</sup> *El Liberal*, 26/08/1936, p.5; BOOM, Núm. 1,666, 01/08/1939, *La fiesta de desagravio al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*, p.206; AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/29.

<sup>80</sup> VINCENT, Mary: "The keys..." p.79.

<sup>81</sup> AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/27; AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/36; AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/414; MONTERO MORENO, Antonio: *Historia...* pp. 647-8.

creased rather than diminished – especially in the field of education. In July 1936, these frustrated anticlericals were finally able to take matters into their own hands. With the structure of political opportunities working in their favour, and their bitter public battle against organised, politicised Catholicism fresh in their memories, they used iconoclastic destruction as a constructive force. Religious buildings, instead of being razed to the ground, became cornerstones of a new society under construction: hospitals, political centres, libraries and – most notably – secular schools. Across the Republican zone, people put into practice the measures that the Republic had failed to achieve legally, transforming churches into national primary schools and workers' universities. In Tetuán de las Victorias (Madrid), the school of the *Hermanas de la Doctrina Cristiana*, which had been attacked in May 1936 by crowds demanding secular education, was stripped of religious imagery and turned into a secular school.<sup>82</sup> As these anticlerical protagonists – suddenly positioned at the forefront of their own social revolution - gave religious objects and buildings new meanings, using them for educational, cultural and logistical ends, they were constructing the secular society which they had fought for on the street for five years, and which the Republic had been unable to give them.

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<sup>82</sup> AHN, CG legajo; 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/271; ADM, PRRD, Caja 1/8, *Informes recibidos de las parroquias, conventos y edificios religiosos de la capital*, 04/39.