

Julio de la Cueva

4 Blasphemy, War and Revolution: Spain, 1936

This chapter examines the role played by blasphemy in the revolutionary situation that unfolded in the Republican zone after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) on July 18, 1936, and the division of Spain into two halves: one loyal to the Republic and the other in the hands of a rebel faction. This revolution was characterised, among other features, by intense violence against those considered enemies of the Republican cause and of the revolution itself. Among the targets of this revolutionary ire, the Catholic Church – its clergy, its movable, and unmoveable property – figured prominently.

The subject of blasphemy, as part of the violence inflicted upon the members and properties of the Catholic Church during the Spanish Civil War, is almost entirely unexplored in the historiography. One reason may be that its relative importance pales in the face of the tremendous impact that the murders and material destruction of the time have on the observer. Moreover, as shown below, the restrictive definition of “blasphemy,” which is common in Spanish culture and language, seems to unduly reduce the scope of the study. In fact, historians of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain have not expressed any particular interest in this subject, in contrast to the focus placed on this phenomenon by historians of early modern Spain, who have largely based their research on Inquisition sources. Interestingly, the study of blasphemy in contemporary Spain has not sparked much enthusiasm among linguists, sociologists or anthropologists either.

The following pages, then, constitute an initial approach to the subject, based on the analysis of 26 micro histories of both blasphemy and incitement to blasphemy that occurred in the province of Toledo between July and October 1936. The sources available for the study of blasphemy in this context are, unfortunately, limited, both in number and in their focus. On the one hand, the sources come, primarily, from the Church in the form of the so-called martyrol-

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ogies that were produced immediately after the Civil War to bear witness to the martyrdom of the clergy murdered in the republican zone. On the other hand, the sources are naturally somewhat coy when it comes to reproducing the exact contents of the blasphemous expressions uttered. The information contained in the martyrologies, then, was supplemented with data from other sources, such as the so-called *Causa General* – the extensive, national fact-finding process opened by the Franco authorities to determine what had happened during the “Red domination in Spain,” i.e. the Civil War – as well as complementary accounts that predate, postdate or are contemporaneous with the events described.

Before presenting the cases, I will first explain what has usually been understood as blasphemy in Spain and provide a definition of this behaviour in the Spanish legal system prior to the incidents. The attempt to define blasphemy from an objective point of view – both lexicographically and legally – does not detract from the subjective implications of a behaviour that is so closely bound up with the emotional reactions of individuals and groups, even though they are culturally acquired. I will then describe the events and place them in the context of sacrilegious acts that would probably be classified as “blasphemous” in other legal and cultural traditions. This is followed by a tentative explanatory framework for blasphemous behaviour in a context of war and revolution. I end with some comments on the return of the legal punishment of blasphemy after the defeat of the Republic and the revolution.

Defining Blasphemy in Spain: the Dictionary and the Law

One of the difficulties when speaking about blasphemous behaviour in comparative terms is the variability of the meaning of the term “blasphemy” in different national and cultural contexts. In 2008, when the Venice Commission tackled “the issue of regulation and prosecution of blasphemy, religious insult and incitement to religious hatred,” it had to begin the section of its report on national legislation by recognizing that “there is no single definition of blasphemy”.¹ One year later, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Committee on

¹ European Commission for Democracy through Law, *Report on the Relationship between Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion: the Issue of Regulation and Prosecution of Blasphemy, Religious Insult and Incitement to Religious Hatred* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2008), accessed August 6, 2020, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2008\)026-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2008)026-e).

Culture, Science and Education nevertheless offered a tentative definition: blasphemy was “the offence of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for god and, by extension, toward anything considered sacred”.²

In Spain, the definition of blasphemy has always been narrower and has tended to be limited to verbal insults against the divinity. The 1936 edition of the dictionary of the Spanish Academy, published contemporaneously with the Civil War events discussed below, defined blasphemy as “insulting words against God, the Virgin or the saints”.³ This definition from the official dictionary of the Spanish language was, moreover, historically employed by Spanish legal doctrine to determine the meaning of blasphemy. The only nuance added to the dictionary by jurisprudence was the determination that insulting “God” also included insults against the Host.⁴ In any case, both the Academy and the law agreed with the popular sentiment: to blaspheme was to make vulgar utterances against God, the Virgin, the saints or the consecrated wafer.

While blasphemy had formed part of the vernacular language in Spain since time immemorial, and the dictionary always included its definition, its presence in the criminal code has been both problematic and intermittent. In the legal system of the old regime, blasphemy was always considered a crime, the seriousness of which depended on the content and intention of the blasphemous expression and the circumstances. Generally speaking, severe sentences were reserved for blasphemy deemed “heretical,” while expressions that were merely “imprecatory” – uttered without any intention to offend the sacred – were handled more lightly (although at times it was not easy to distinguish one from the other). In fact, the Inquisition did not usually pass judgement on imprecatory blasphemy, which was reserved for the civil courts.⁵ With the advent of the liberal regime and the suppression of the Inquisition, the crime of heresy disappeared, but the crime of blasphemy was not eradicated from the legal system.

² Committee on Culture, Science and Education, *Blasphemy, Religious Insults and Hate Speech against Persons on Grounds of Their Religion* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2007), accessed August 6, 2020, <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-XrefViewHTML.asp?FileID=11521&lang=en>.

³ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1939), 180. This edition was prepared for publication in 1936, but the outbreak of the war postponed its appearance until 1939.

⁴ Antonio Quintano Ripollés, “Blasfemia,” in *Nueva enciclopedia jurídica*, ed. Carlos E. Mascarñas (Barcelona: Francisco Seix, 1989); Jaime Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal: un estudio de la jurisprudencia de la Sala 2^a del Tribunal Supremo en el período 1930–1995* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1996), 155–156.

⁵ Martí Gelabertó Vilagran, “Legislación y justicia contra blasfemos (Cataluña, siglos XV–XVII),” *Hispania Sacra* 64 (2012).

The first Spanish penal code dates back to 1822 and in it, blasphemy uttered in public was considered a crime to be punished by imprisonment. The 1848 penal code, however, did not consider blasphemy a crime, but rather a minor offense in its Article 480. Both codes punished “those who blaspheme God, the Virgin and the saints,” while the partial reform of 1850 added “and sacred things”.⁶ After freedom of worship was recognised in the Constitution of 1869, blasphemy disappeared from the 1870 penal code. However, in 1902 the Supreme Court again established jurisprudence to condemn blasphemers, determining that they had committed an offense “against decency and good morals without committing a crime,” according to Article 586.2 of the code.⁷ In fact, under this interpretation, allegations against blasphemers were heard from time to time in regional courts, usually lodged by clergymen.⁸ Blasphemy briefly reappeared in the penal code of 1928, one in a long list of offenses against “public decency”. Finally, under the Republic, it once again disappeared from the 1932 penal code, which reproduced the 1870 code on blasphemy word for word.⁹

Although beginning in 1870 the criminal code only punished blasphemy indirectly via Article 586.2, from 1882 on, another legal instrument made it possible to repress blasphemers more directly. This was the Provincial Law, whose Article 22 urged civil governors – the authority that represented the government in each province – to “repress acts against morality or public decency” by imposing a fine. Under this law, civil governors in a number of provinces published circulars calling upon local authorities and police forces to report and fine blasphemers.¹⁰ Complaints must have been quite frequently lodged against those who blasphemed in public under this law, although no systematic studies of its application have been done.¹¹ Finally, town and city councils could also issue – and they did, indeed, do so – ordinances prohibiting blasphemy in their munic-

⁶ Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal*, 44–45, 63–65, 71–72; Juan Ferreiro Galguera, *Protección jurídico penal de la religión* (A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 1998), 89, 95.

⁷ Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal*, 82–86; Ferreiro Galguera, *Protección jurídico penal*, 103–119.

⁸ M. Pilar Salomón Chéliz, *Anticlericalismo en Aragón. Protesta popular y movilización política (1900–1936)* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2002), 136.

⁹ Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal*; Ferreiro Galguera, *Protección jurídico penal*.

¹⁰ Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal*, 86; Agustín Coy Cotonat, *Blasfemias y obscenidades en el lenguaje* (Barcelona: Librería de Manuel Vergés, 1918), 55–59.

¹¹ Alberto González González, “Anticlericalismo, secularización y recatolización. La cuestión religiosa en la provincia de Toledo en la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil (1931–1939)” (PhD diss., Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2018), 196, accessed August 7, 2020, <https://ruidera.uclm.es/xmlui/handle/10578/20536>.

ipalities. Thus, for example, Article 8.1 of the municipal ordinance of the city of Toledo, passed in 1890, prohibited “the public utterance of blasphemy or sarcastic or indecorous words against the dogmas of any religion protected or tolerated by the state”.¹² The Article displayed a curious ecumenical spirit, probably in accordance with the liberal composition of the city council at the time.

Even though Spanish law limited “blasphemy” to verbal insults and did not include other manifestations of contempt or lack of reverence toward the sacred, this does not mean that such acts were not punished. Since the first Spanish penal code in 1822, all subsequent codes classified any act that infringed upon the free exercise of religious worship or upon the ministers or properties of the Catholic Church (or, when applicable, any other religion), as a crime. Like its predecessors, the Penal Code of 1932, which was in force when the acts described below were committed, determined that a crime was committed by anyone who “insulted the minister of any religion,” “impeded, disturbed or interrupted the observance of religious functions,” “publicly ridiculed any of the dogmas or ceremonies of any religion with proselytes in Spain” or “publicly profaned images, liturgical vessels or any other object used for worship” (Article 235), among other so-called “crimes related to the freedom of conscience and freedom of religious worship”.¹³ That being the case, in Spain no one would have deemed these behaviours to be blasphemous.

Committing and Inciting Blasphemy in the Province of Toledo in 1936

The province of Toledo covers 15,369 square kilometres in the current region of Castilla-La Mancha in the middle of Spain, south of Madrid. In 1936, 185 of its municipalities belonged to the Diocese of Toledo, while 12 were attached to the Diocese of Avila and 7 to the Diocese of Cuenca. When the Civil War broke out, the entire province fell on the side of the Republic. One small group of rebels took refuge in the historic Toledo fortress, the Alcázar, which was besieged until it was liberated by the rebel army on September 28, 1936. In late October and until the end of the war, the front stabilised along the Tagus River, with

¹² Ayuntamiento de Toledo, *Ordenanzas municipales de la ciudad de Toledo y su término* (Toledo: Imprenta de J. de Lara, 1890), 32. For other towns in the province of Toledo, see González González, *Anticlericalismo*, 147, 441.

¹³ Rossell Granados, *Religión y jurisprudencia penal*, 117–125; Ferreiro Galguera, *Protección jurídico penal*, 132–137.

the southern half of the province in the hands of the Republic and the northern half, including the city of Toledo, in the hands of the Nationalists. This division of the province and the territorial configuration of the two halves would last until the end of the Civil War with almost no significant changes.

One of the first and most striking consequences of the military uprising was the collapse of the Republican rule of law, not only in the areas where the rebels managed to impose their military might, but also in the regions where the coup d'état failed. There, the power vacuum created by the partial collapse of the state, the climate of civil war and the distribution of weapons among the workers' militias triggered a revolution, led by socialists, anarchists and communists – still a minuscule force at that time – accompanied at times by leftist Republicans. The state lost the legitimate monopoly over violence, which the revolutionaries appropriated and applied implacably against anyone judged to be an enemy, one of the most important being the Catholic Church. In the whole of Spain, between 6,733 and 6,832 clergymen were murdered.¹⁴ In the province of Toledo itself, 223 priests were killed – some 60 per cent of the secular clergy – just as 107 male members of religious orders met a violent death.¹⁵ Moreover, while the violence against persons was atrocious, the violence against religious buildings, images and objects of worship was even more widespread. In only 13 of Toledo's 204 municipalities did the ecclesiastical heritage escape damage.¹⁶

Blasphemy, using the meaning discussed in the previous section, was usually associated with anticlerical violence. It could even be said that blasphemy formed an integral part of this violence, not only in the province of Toledo, but throughout Spain.¹⁷ Firstly, it was not uncommon for the protagonists of vi-

14 Julio de la Cueva, “Violent Culture Wars: Religion and Revolution in Mexico, Russia and Spain in the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 3 (2018); Fernando del Rey, *Retaguardia roja. Violencia y revolución en la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2019); José Luis Ledesma, “Enemigos seculares. La violencia anticlerical (1936–1939),” in *Izquierda obrera y religión en España (1900–1939)*, ed. Julio de la Cueva and Feliciano Montero (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 2012). General numbers of victims can be found in Antonio Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España, 1936–1939* (Madrid: BAC, 1961), 758–768; Ángel David Martín Rubio, “La persecución religiosa en España. Una aportación sobre las cifras,” *Hispania Sacra* 53 (2001).

15 González González, *Anticlericalismo*, 381; Juan Francisco Rivera, *La persecución religiosa en la diócesis de Toledo (1936–1939)* (Toledo: Arzobispado de Toledo, 1995), 592–596; Sebastián Cirac Estopañán, *Martirologio de Cuenca* (Barcelona: Casa Provincial de Caridad, 1947), 553.

16 González González, *Anticlericalismo*, 407.

17 Julio de la Cueva, “Religious Persecution, Anticlerical Tradition and Revolution: On Atrocities against the Clergy during the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (1998).

olent acts to accompany them with expressions of blasphemy. For instance, according to accounts gathered after the war, on July 24, 1936, the Franciscan nuns of Fuensalida were evicted from their convent “amid blasphemy and insults”. The next day, the cleric Gregorio del Valle was arrested in Toledo and on the way to the site of his execution by firing squad, he had to listen to numerous blasphemies, which he tried to drown out with cheers to Christ the King – the cry “Long live Christ the King!,” which would be recited time and again, had become the hallmark of contemporary Catholic martyrs after being popularised by the victims of the anticlerical policies of the Mexican Revolution in 1926. On July 30, in Talavera de la Reina, the priest Clemente Villasante was marched through the city in the midst of blasphemies before being killed. That same month in El Viso de San Juan, the corpses of two priests were disinterred and symbolically shot “amid shouts and blasphemies”.



Fig. 3: Destroyed calvary with statues of Christ and the Good Thief at St. Elizabeth's Convent in Toledo, 1936. Photo by Pelayo Mas Castañeda. Courtesy of Postulación Mártires, Arzobispado de Toledo.

On August 3, in the town of Pulgar, “a squad of Marxists” entered the parish church and chapel and, after wreaking havoc in the buildings, donned the sacred vestments they found along the way, “hurling blasphemies.” On August

5, the coadjutor of Oropesa, Nicéforo Pérez, was tortured and murdered, once again in the midst of blasphemies. On 16 August, an outside militia group entered the town of Alcabón and set fire to the images in the parish church “amid blasphemy and mockery”. The parish priest of Yuncos, Aurelio Pérez Valverde, was killed on August 21, “amid blasphemies and insults for continuing to carry a crucifix in his hand”. On September 4, as he himself later recounted, the priest Dionisio Barragán was arrested in Sonseca, where he had arrived after fleeing the nearby town of Mazarambroz, and taken to the barracks of the local militias, where he was beaten “amid blasphemy and taunting”. Nine days later, when the same cleric was being booked into the Toledo provincial prison, he had to endure even more “expletives against religion and the priesthood” from the militiamen, women and young lads standing in the entryway to the jail, after one of them recognized him as a priest.¹⁸

Almost as common as the blasphemies on the lips of the revolutionaries themselves was their incitement to commit blasphemy on the part of their clerical victims. On an undetermined date in Alcubilete, the priest Mariano Ruiz was stripped and subjected to a variety of torments. Apparently, female workers from a nearby tinned food factory led the ordeal, “making heavy-handed suggestions, engaging in indecently vile insolences” and “urging him to commit blasphemy”. On an unknown date, another clergyman was tortured in the town of Rielves at the hands of assailants who were eager to force him to blaspheme. His only response, before being burned alive, was to continue to cry out “Long live Christ the King!” The parish priest of Lillo, Álvaro Manzano, was “subjected to the lowest humiliation to get him to commit blasphemy” between his arrest on July 22, and his death by firing squad on August 10. On July 24, in Quintanar de la Orden, the chaplain Juan Dupuy was murdered after being beaten and incited to blaspheme; his invariable response, apparently, was to shout: “Praise be to God! Praise be to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar! Long live Christ the King!” In Escalonilla on July 28, the Franciscan Antonio Sierra was hung upside down inside a well from a rope and threatened with drowning if he would not blaspheme, before he was executed by firing squad.

¹⁸ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Causa General, 1047, file 14; Rivera Recio, *La persecución religiosa*, 26–28, 189, 295, 322, 334, 389, 412, 600; Andrés Sánchez Sánchez and José Antonio Calvo Gómez, *Mártires de nuestro tiempo: pasión y gloria de la Iglesia abulense* (Ávila: Cabildo Catedral, 2003), 185. On the cry “Long live Christ the King” and the impact of its use in Spanish Catholicism, see Julio de la Cueva, “Los ecos de la Revolución Mexicana. El catolicismo español en la transnacionalización de un conflicto (1926–1927),” in *Más allá de los nacionalcatolicismos. Redes transnacionales del catolicismo hispánico contemporáneo*, ed. José Ramón Rodríguez Lago and Natalia Núñez Bargueño (Madrid, Silex, 2021).

Pressure to see clergy profess blasphemies continued unabatedly in August. In Cazalegas, two attempts were made on August 3 to force the parish priest Manuel Nieto to commit blasphemy; after he refused a second time, he was shot at until he died. On August 5, Restituto Mediero, the parish priest of Oropesa, was taken from his house to a spot outside the town where attempts were made to force him to commit blasphemy; when he refused to do so, his tongue was cut out before his body was riddled with bullets. In Villa de Don Fadrique on August 9, the parish priest Francisco López was murdered after being severely beaten with a “tenacious attempt to make him commit blasphemy”. The revolutionaries in the town used a female neighbour to inform his coadjutor, Miguel Beato, of their desire that he “commit blasphemy and renounce his faith”. In response to his refusal, he was jailed and beaten to death on October 21 after days of “insinuations and blows to get him to blaspheme,” to which he responded with the cry, “Long live Christ the King!” On August 7, the parish priest of Parrillas, Rafael Bueno, was murdered after more than a month of taunting and incitements to blasphemy. Liberio González Nombela was arrested in Torrijos on August 18, and urged to blaspheme, which he refused to do: “I am a priest and the mouth of the priest can never be sullied by blasphemy”. He was executed by firing squad. Finally, on October 17, the Franciscan friar Perfecto Carrascosa was murdered in Villacañas after being tortured; his “tormentors were keen to make him blaspheme the Blessed Virgin”.¹⁹

The sources used to document these facts do not contain the words that comprised the blasphemies uttered by the revolutionaries or what they wanted the clergymen to say. However, it is not difficult to imagine them. Other sources give a rather precise idea of what constituted blasphemy in the 1930s; it is practically the same as what constitutes blasphemy today. As observed by anthropologist Manuel Delgado, Spanish blasphemy is beset by a type of copromania with regard to the sacred. It consists of conjugating the verb vulgarly used to designate the act of defecating in the first person singular of the present indicative and placing it before the name of God, the Virgin, one of the saints – or even all of the saints – or the word “host” in the sense of the consecrated wafer.²⁰

¹⁹ Rivera Recio, *La persecución religiosa*, 30, 258, 260, 261, 276, 338, 390, 400; Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa*, 607, 609; Cirac Estopañán, *Martirologio*, 407; Sánchez Sánchez and Calvo Gómez, *Mártires*, 183, 189.

²⁰ Manuel Delgado, *Luces iconoclastas: anticlericalismo, espacio y ritual en la España contemporánea* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2001), 136–141; Ricardo García Muñoz, “Blasfemias y juramentos en la lengua española: de ayer a hoy,” in *Aktual'nye problemy romanskix jazykov i sovremennye metodiki ix prepodavanija. Materialy Meždunarodnoj naučno-praktičeskoj konferencii*, ed. V.N. Vasiljeva (Kazan: Vestfalika, 2015).

To “soil oneself (sh*t) on God” was, according to one Catholic publicist in 1930, “the most terrible blasphemy” and “the most vulgar”. This was confirmed by the Redemptorist Father Ramón Sarabia, who had extensive experience preaching around the country: “it seems that the dictionary of the Spanish language contains only one word: that foul word, the most foul and disgusting word in life and at every turn, Spaniards today hurl this word against God’s holy name”. The Catalonian priest Ricard Aragó, who signed using the pseudonym Ivon L’Escop, confirmed that “I sh*t on God, the Virgin, the saints or the host” was also the most common blasphemy in his mother tongue. Much earlier, in the aforementioned Supreme Court sentence of a civil servant for blasphemy in 1902, the decision included the fact that the offence consisted of twice uttering the expression “I sh*t on God”.²¹ Clearly then, as now, the formula could be varied by adding other rude words, but basically most blasphemy mentioned in the sources must have adhered to this pattern.

This does not mean that blasphemous language contained no variations. For instance, it is quite probable that the revolutionaries who invaded the religious buildings and destroyed the sacred images directed coarse words at representations of Christ, the Virgin and the saints in paintings and sculptures. While there is no direct evidence of this for the province of Toledo, acts of this sort have been confirmed for other places in Spain. For example, in Lepe, Andalusia, the Virgin of Beauty was vandalized, shot at and thrown into the Piedras River amid “ridicule and taunting”.²² It is also quite possible that in some of the cases in which members of the clergy were incited to commit blasphemy, the words were less crude than “I sh*t on...”. For instance, in the province of Toledo, as was documented in other parts of Spain, they may have been incited to shout “Death to Christ!” or “Death to God!” or “Death to the Virgin!” or to simply declare that God does not exist; in other words, less blasphemy and more apostasy.²³ However, this was probably not the usual practice.

²¹ Anacleto Moreno, *La blasfemia. Memoria presentada a la Asamblea Diocesana del Apostolado de la Oración, que se celebró en Oviedo en los días 30 de abril y 1 y 2 de mayo de 1930 convocada por el Excmo. e Ilmo. Sr. Obispo de la Diócesis* (Oviedo: Establecimiento Tipográfico La Cruz, 1930); Ramón Sarabia, *España... ¿es católica?: charlas de un misionero* (Madrid: El Perpetuo Socorro, 1939), 296; Ivon L’Escop, *La llengua catalana: Manual contra la blasfèmia* (Barcelona: Políglota, 1931); Ferreiro Galguera, *Protección jurídico-penal*, 119.

²² Juan Ordóñez Márquez, *La apostasía de las masas y la persecución religiosa en la provincia de Huelva: 1931–1936* (Madrid: CSIC, 1968), 106.

²³ Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa*, 598–609. These pages also include numerous cases of incitement to blasphemy from across Spain.

From Blasphemy to Other Forms of Sacrilegious Behaviour

Along with these forms of verbal blasphemy, many other behaviours that were sacrilegious, or “sacrophobic” – to use the term proposed by Manuel Delgado – appeared during the summer and fall of 1936.²⁴ These acts could fall into the category of blasphemy in other cultural contexts and, of course, under the definition proposed by the Council of Europe Committee on Culture, Science and Education presented earlier: performing liturgical parodies, profaning corpses and relics, damaging images and objects of worship, destroying or desacralizing churches, aggression in the form of abuse, torture against or murder of religious personnel in their capacity as such.²⁵ These acts, as noted above, would even have been considered crimes in the 1932 Spanish penal code, which was in effect in 1936, although the code did not describe them as “blasphemy,” but as “insult,” “ridicule” or “profanity”. As a detailed account of these sacrilegious acts in the province of Toledo would be endless, I limit my list to the actions performed in the towns where I have been able to establish the use of verbal blasphemy and, where possible, found a relationship with sacrilege.

In the smaller towns, the people who committed sacrilegious acts were likely to be the same as those who blasphemed or incited blasphemy. In a city like Toledo, this is also probable, but it is more difficult to demonstrate. In any case, it is interesting to note that on July 25, the day on which Gregorio del Valle was forced to endure constant blasphemy as he walked to the site of his execution, four other clergymen were murdered in the city, two churches and two convents were set on fire and destroyed in the flames, and two other convents were attacked. Moreover, in the days prior to and weeks after these events, many more clergymen were murdered, up to 109 – in fact, only 11 survived – and many more religious buildings were destroyed or used for profane purposes,

²⁴ Manuel Delgado, *La ira sagrada: anticlericalismo, iconoclastia y antirritualismo en la España contemporánea* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1992).

²⁵ On the persistence of a broader concept of blasphemy in many countries in the Christian West to the present day, see David Nash, *Blasphemy in the Christian World: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For examples of the forms of iconoclasm and sacrilege mentioned, see De la Cueva, “Religious Persecution”; Mary Vincent, “The Keys to the Kingdom: Religious Violence in the Spanish Civil War, July-August 1936,” in *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, ed. Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Maria Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury: Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931–1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).



Fig. 4: Destroyed statue of St. John the Evangelist from the Convent of the Franciscan Conception in Toledo, 1936. Photo by Pelayo Mas Castañeda. Courtesy of Postulación Mártires, Arzobispado de Toledo.

while a large number of images were totally or partially damaged. One of the buildings that suffered the most was the Concepción Franciscana convent; it was sacked, the corpses buried there were profaned, and its religious carvings were defaced and even shot. A wooden image of St. John the Evangelist became famous after the hands were cut off and the letters “FAI” (short for *Federación Anarquista Ibérica*, or Iberian Anarchist Federation) carved into its chest.²⁶ Numerous other acts of sacrophobic violence that coincided with the recourse to blasphemy in time and space were also committed in the rest of the province of Toledo. These were quite similar to what occurred in the provincial capital and fall into the categories identified above: violence against persons, the desecration of religious buildings, iconoclasm, exhumation and liturgical parodies.²⁷

This chapter has already introduced many of the clergymen who, after being forced to listen to the blasphemy uttered by others or withstand the incitement to blaspheme themselves, were killed, often after undergoing torture. However, these were not the only members of the clergy who met this sad fate in the towns where blasphemous behaviour played out. In Talavera de la Reina, the largest city in the province after the capital, three priests and four friars were murdered in addition to the aforementioned Gregorio Villasante. In Pulgar, not only was the church attacked by the townspeople amid blasphemy, but the priest was also stabbed to death by a group of outsiders who went by the name of “The Justice of the Spanish People”. In Oropesa, another clergyman was killed along with Nicéforo Pérez and Restituto Mediero. All three were tortured and Pérez’s genitals were mutilated. In Rielves, in addition to the clergyman who was burned alive, three other friars were murdered as well. In Quintanar de la Orden, six secular priests and eight Franciscan monks were tortured and murdered in addition to Juan Dupuy. In Cazalegas, two priests were killed in addition to the parish priest. An additional clergyman was killed in Villa de Don Fadrique together with the parish priest and coadjutor. In Villacañas, three priests accompanied Father Carrascosa on his final, fatal journey. All four clergymen were lampooned and tortured.²⁸

²⁶ Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 189–190; González González, *Anticlericalismo*, 378, 391–395.

²⁷ A study on the neighbouring province of Ciudad Real reveals similar patterns of destruction and desecration: Fernando del Rey Reguillo, “1936. La destrucción de los espacios y símbolos del culto católico en La Mancha,” *Hispania* 89 (2020).

²⁸ Archivo Histórico Nacional, FC Causa General, 1045, files 12, 69; 1046, file 46; 1047, file 14. Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 258, 260–261, 338, 600; Sánchez Sánchez and Calvo Gómez, *Mártires*, 184–186; Cirac Estopañán, *Martirologio*, 406–407.



Fig. 5: Desecrated graves at St Michael's Church in Toledo, 1936. Photo by Pelayo Mas Ca-
stañeda. Courtesy of Postulación Mártires, Arzobispado de Toledo.

The desecration of churches, destruction of images and, at times, disinterment of bodies were usually done in tandem. All four religious buildings in Fuensalida were plundered. The Franciscan convent became the House of the People – in other words the headquarters of the Socialist trade union and party – and the others a warehouse for oil, a granary and a grocery. The parish church, whose images were hacked to bits, was used as a granary. In Talavera de la Reina, two parish churches and four convents were sacked. Some images were burned and others defaced, and some adornments and objects of worship were destroyed. One church and one convent were used as warehouses, while the anarchists established an anarchist workers' centre (*Ateneo Libertario*) in another. In El Viso de San Juan, in addition to the disinterment of the two priests mentioned above, sacred vestments and images were destroyed; this church, too, became the headquarters of the revolutionary committee. In Oropesa, although the parish church did not suffer any serious damage, the convent of the Conceptionist Sisters did. The images in its chapel were destroyed and the Virgin's statue dragged through the town streets by a rope before being burned. A dance hall was set up in the chapel. The images in another chapel in the town were also shot up. In Yuncos, a theatre was installed in the parish church, and the altarpieces and images were destroyed, like the parish church images, by militias arrived from the town of Carabanchel Bajo, near Madrid.²⁹

In Rielves, the church was plundered and the images in it burnt. In Lillo, the entire contents of the parish church and the five chapels in the town were consigned to the flames and two of the chapels were converted into stables. In Quintanar de la Orden, the parish church, four convents and four chapels were sacked, and their images and objects of worship destroyed or stolen. In Escalonilla, all the carvings in the church were damaged. The fate of the Virgin of Solitude was unique; she was decapitated and her head was used as a football. The Virgin of the Star, in turn, was hanged from an olive tree. The consecrated wafers were scattered on the streets and the church was used as a dance hall. In Cazalegas, some of the altarpieces in the church were damaged. In Villa de Don Fadrique, all the contents of the places of worship were destroyed and in Parrillas, the assailants of the parish church destroyed all the altars, altarpieces, images and religious objects inside it. In Torrijos, the parish church and the local convent were used for a variety of secular purposes and some of their images were defaced. In Villacañas, all of the altars and images in the parish church and four

²⁹ Archivo Histórico Nacional, FC Causa General, 1045, files 12, 46, 60; 1046, files 23, 46. Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 332, 352–354, 401–402, 334; Sánchez Sánchez and Calvo Gómez, *Mártires*, 180–181.

chapels were the object of iconoclastic brutality, the consecrated wafers were thrown onto the ground and acts of worship were mimicked using the sacred ornaments.³⁰

Closely related to the sacking of churches and acts of iconoclasm were the spontaneous, facetious representations of liturgical acts performed by the assailants after they had seized the vestments and objects of worship. In Pulgar, according to an anonymous local source who drafted the report for the *Causa General*, the attackers of the parish church and chapel

[...] destroyed the images, smashing and shooting them, then tearing them down from their altars and constantly mocking them while committing other immoral acts. In the meanwhile, they donned the vestments, hurling blasphemies and giving sermons from the altars and pulpits, then going up and down all the streets in the town in a grotesque procession, entering all the taverns and establishments, always followed by kids who, trained and directed by someone older, deafened the neighbourhood with whistles, trumpets and pipes from the magnificent organ that had once been in the chapel, carrying remains of the images like trophies.³¹

Pulgar was not the only town in Toledo where the celebrations of the Catholic liturgy were imitated. In Alcabón, for instance, once the outsiders had finished their destructive mission, townspeople dressed up in the articles of worship and parodied the liturgical acts. In Lillo, too, comic parodies of processions were performed, and in Villa de Don Fadrique, the revolutionaries donned the vestments they found and then improvised liturgical parodies in the streets.³²

One of the places with the most notable connection between blasphemy and sacrilege was Sonseca, a town in which seven resident priests were murdered. Here, the revolutionaries hung an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and made a large bonfire with the church carvings “amid blasphemy and glee”. Even more odd, however, was the fact that they wanted to force the parish priest, Leoncio Martín, to burn an image of the Christ of Veracruz with his own hand, suggestively mirroring the incitements to blasphemy that occurred in other places.³³

³⁰ Archivo Histórico Nacional, FC Causa General, 1045, files 18, 69, 70; Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 258–261, 275–276, 338, 400–401, 416–418; Cirac Estopañán, *Martirologio*, 403–417.

³¹ Archivo Histórico Nacional, FC Causa General, 1047, file 14.

³² Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 258–261, 275–276, 389.

³³ Ibid., 380–382.

From Reviled Practice to Revolutionary Password

Blasphemy was a very deep-rooted practice among the Spanish lower classes, although at times it also extended to the higher strata of the population. In his classic essay on Spanish Catholicism, historian Stanley Payne observed: “For several centuries, the most striking verbal contradiction in the highly sacralised Spanish culture was its exaggerated propensity for sacrilege and blasphemy, carried to a greater extent in Castilian than in any other western language”.³⁴

“There is so much blasphemy,” lamented Ivon L’Escop in 1931, “despite the magistrate and the priest”. Indeed, it was not unusual for Catholic treatise writers to dedicate pages to condemnations of the Spanish habit of blasphemy, observing that Spain was “the country of blasphemers” and “the people of blasphemy” par excellence. In fact, in their opinion, Spain stood out among the “civilized” nations because of this ugly practice.³⁵ Most of these publicists nevertheless recognized that, in general, blasphemy occurred inadvertently: “those who blaspheme know not what they say and blaspheme by accident,” admitted L’Escop.³⁶ Moreover, the ratification of the scale of blasphemy in 1930s Spain does not appear to have been the obsession of a few Catholics who, scandalized by its use, might have exaggerated its magnitude. Indeed, in his memoirs, film director Luis Buñuel wrote about a time when he was commissioned by the Republic to handle some affairs in Geneva but was stopped at the Spanish-French border by a small group of anarchists. After inspecting his documents, they snapped at him: “you cannot pass with this”. Buñuel’s reaction was to let loose with a blasphemy, “uttered in all its seemly intensity,” at which point the anarchists changed their minds and let him continue on his way. “The Spanish language is capable of more scathing blasphemies than any other language I know,” said the filmmaker by way of justification.³⁷

If blasphemy was so widespread and its social use relatively accepted, why should the cases of blasphemy presented in the second section of this chapter

³⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Overview* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 59–60. The same is true of Catalan, as condemned by Catalan-speaking Catholic publicists. For a discussion of the relationship between blasphemy and social class in Spain, see Matthew Kerry’s chapter in this book.

³⁵ L’Escop, *La lengua catalana*, 116; Coy Cotonat, *Blasfemias*, 11; Agustín Serrano de Haro, *La Blasfemia: obra premiada en el concurso nacional abierto por “El Agro Andaluz” de Jaén y resuelto en junio del año 1930* (Murcia: Tip. San Francisco, 1930), 56; Sarabia, *España, ¿es católica?*, 292–293.

³⁶ L’Escop, *La lengua catalana*, 109.

³⁷ Luis Buñuel, *Mi último suspiro (Memorias)* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1982), 155–156.

have special significance? I suggest two reasons. First, in the Republican zone during the summer and autumn of 1936, blasphemy ceased to be an inadvertent- ly used imprecation and became a demonstration of verbal sacrophobia that was deliberately employed as an instrument of desacralisation and a form of aggression. Secondly, blasphemy became a password, a kind of formula to indicate support for the Republican/revolutionary cause, used to recognize comrades in arms, or to unmask an enemy.

The deliberate nature of the use of blasphemy in the situations described here is suggested by the context in which the blasphemous expressions occurred. Manuel Delgado has suggested that the blasphemous language used on a daily basis by lower-class Spanish males usually lacked an iconoclastic component, even one of low intensity. Blasphemy, then, was a normalized activity, as widespread in the regions where religious practice was strong as where it was weak: “The iconoclasts committed blasphemy, but no more than the iconodules”.³⁸ Perhaps for that reason, the poet Antonio Machado was able to write in 1936: “Blasphemy forms part of popular religion. Do not trust a people that does not commit blasphemy; there atheism is popular”.³⁹ Blasphemy, then, originated in familiarity with the sacred, the result of its omnipresence in Spanish society. Such a familiarity made it easier to vent viciously against God, the Virgin or the saints, without this necessarily indicating a lack of faith or even the intention to directly offend the sacred beings. However, as Delgado argues, the tie of familiarity with the sacred through blasphemy indicated a rather paradoxical relationship, a way of maintaining both proximity and distance, in which the move from friendly to hostile violence could take place at any moment, when personal or community circumstances so favoured it.⁴⁰ In fact, the distance between the sacred and the profane had been progressively widening for some social groups since the early twentieth century, keeping pace with the first process of Spanish secularisation and the dissemination of anticlerical and secularist ideas. The alienation of one part of the population from Catholicism accelerated during the turbulent years of the Republic.⁴¹ In this situation, it is plausible to argue that the circumstances of the summer and autumn of 1936 facilitated this step –

³⁸ Delgado, *Luces iconoclastas*, 143.

³⁹ Antonio Machado, *Juan de Mairena. Sentencias, donaires, apuntes y recuerdos de un profesor apócrifo* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1936), 8.

⁴⁰ Delgado, *Luces iconoclastas*, 144–146.

⁴¹ Julio de la Cueva, “The Assault on the City of the Levites: Spain,” in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Thomas, *The Faith*, 45–73.

when it had not already been taken – towards an expression of blasphemy that was manifestly hostile to religion.

In the exceptional situation of 1936, blasphemy could no longer be considered – at least not only – the unconscious product of a popular way of speaking, but rather needed to be seen as invectives intentionally uttered. The emotional charge usually contained in blasphemy when expressing anger, or simply despair, did not disappear; in all events, it made the emotions even more intense. What changed was the intentional nature of the blasphemy, which was even more obvious when the blasphemous expressions were declared with the clear aim of making them heard by the ministers of Catholicism in order to offend them. Without a doubt, the deliberation behind these outbursts was even more evident when these ministers were incited to blasphemy. These blasphemous expressions, then, can only be understood as an integral part of the violence unleashed at the beginning of the war, which acquired a notable revolutionary cast in the Republican zone. As noted above, the revolution attacked the Catholic Church with particular savagery, along with the entire sphere of the sacred identified with it. This “sacrophobia” not only spilled over into homicidal and iconoclastic impulses, but also found fertile ground for its expression in the field of language. In fact, blasphemy did not constitute the only way in which language was used in the pursuit of desacralisation during these months. Throughout the Republican zone, for instance, the word ‘*adiós*’ (‘good-bye’, a contraction of ‘*a Dios*’ or ‘*to God*’), commonly used by Spaniards when bidding someone farewell, was suppressed in daily language and replaced by the more secular ‘*salud*’ (‘to your health’). Similarly, in many areas the place names of towns or streets that might be related to Catholic religion disappeared (although in the case of the province of Toledo, the examples found all correspond to changes in street names done before the Civil War).⁴² In short, the temporal and spatial coincidence of the expansion of blasphemy with other irreverent, iconoclastic or directly homicidal behaviours appears to support the idea that they were premeditated.

Understanding blasphemy as a type of ‘antifascist’ or revolutionary ‘password’ also seems to correspond to the events described here. In her study of anticlerical violence and iconoclasm during the Spanish Civil War, Maria Thomas emphasized their “unifying function, forging and reinforcing bonds within the groups that took the lead in the acts, and within the wider community”.⁴³ Thomas’s observation could be applied to the role played by blasphemy. To blas-

⁴² De la Cueva, “Religious persecution”; González González, *Anticlericalismo*, 566–576.

⁴³ Thomas, *The Faith*, 125.

pheme offered a guarantee of belonging to the community. Unquestionably, blasphemy filled a role of mutual recognition between men from the popular classes. In fact, it was a characteristic trait not only of the popular sociolect, but of the popular male sociolect, and hence to some extent a demonstration of masculinity. It is no surprise, then, that, among the popular classes, the act of blaspheming was a rite of passage for adolescent males eager to be accepted as equals in the adult male community.⁴⁴

Not to blaspheme in this way cast a shadow of suspicion over whomever did not do so. In fact, it could be argued that, even in the past, clergymen had never been fully integrated into the communities they served, not even the parish priests. Their position in the social hierarchy (even if they came from humble origins), their alliances with the powerful, the celibacy, the tonsure, the cassock, their manner of speaking – including avoiding vulgar language –, their very aura of sanctity, all separated them from the others. This separation was more obvious in the case of men, especially those from the lower classes, whose hostility to priests was “fairly universal”.⁴⁵ In general, priests tended to socialize with women, who comprised the bulk of their parishioners, and the men with whom they associated belonged, in most cases, to the local middle and upper classes (it is probably not necessary to clarify that in a context of the feminisation of religion, the strict observance of religious precepts was considered a “woman’s thing” by many). However, during a time of revolution, when all social barriers came crashing down, the clergy lost their right to be considered distinct. For that reason, in addition to taking off their cassocks, working and enduring being addressed informally, they had to blaspheme. Committing blasphemy would show that they were willing to be on an equal footing with everyone else. Above all, it would show that the clergy wished to be equal to other men. Only a man who blasphemed could be considered, first, a real man and, then, a real man of the people.

In addition to being considered outsiders in the popular community, priests were – not unreasonably – suspected of being alienated from the Republic and the revolution. The Catholic Church had constituted one of the pillars of the monarchical regime of the Restoration (1875 – 1923) and the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923 – 1930), which preceded the Republic (1931 – 1936).

⁴⁴ José Luis García García, “La utilización diferencial del lenguaje en distintos contextos de identidad,” in *As linguas e as identidades: ensaios de etnografía e de interpretación antropológica*, ed. Xaquín S. Rodríguez Campos (Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1997); Delgado, *Luces iconoclastas*, 135 – 136.

⁴⁵ William A. Christian Jr, *Person and God in a Spanish Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 151 – 153.

Moreover, the Church had always been distinguished by its cultivation of an antiliberal, antisocialist and counterrevolutionary discourse. Although its attitude towards the Republic was generally one of compliance, the suspicion that there was something insincere in the deference shown to the new regime by the church authorities was inevitable. Moreover, church-state relations had soon begun to deteriorate as a result of the Republic's secular legislation. This then led to the political mobilisation of Catholics with the ultimate aim of reversing the legal changes enshrined in the Constitution and other laws. The resulting organisation, the Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights (CEDA), became one of the main political powers, even winning the 1933 general election. The socialists and leftist Republicans believed this new party to be incompatible with the Republic, and between 1931 and 1936, many towns witnessed repeated incidents between Catholics, on the one hand, and socialists and other leftist groups on the other.

Some priests became actively involved in fomenting the Catholic political reaction in their towns, sympathizing either with the fledgling CEDA or with older parties like the Traditionalist Communion. Other members of the clergy remained neutral.⁴⁶ In any case, for all concerned, it seemed natural to classify the clergy as being "on the Right". Thus, as part of the *Causa General*, the local authorities were asked to complete a "list of persons living in this municipality who were violently killed during the Red domination" along with a number of details about each one, including their profession and political affiliation. In the city of Toledo and in many towns, political activism on the part of the clergy was not disclosed, while in others clerical sympathy towards traditionalism (as in the cases of Liberio González in Torrijos and Aurelio Pérez in Yuncos) or the CEDA (Álvaro Manzano in Lillo) was registered. The case of Quintanar de la Orden is particularly interesting. There, all the members of the secular clergy who were murdered were generically categorized as "rightists," while all the members of the regular clergy were described as "traditionalists".⁴⁷

It is no surprise, then, that the incitement to blasphemy was used as a type of opportunity offered to the clergy to demonstrate their conversion to the revolutionary cause, however disingenuous it might be. Accordingly, it was not uncommon for incitements to blasphemy to alternate with orders to shout out rev-

⁴⁶ William J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain 1875–1998* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 20–106, 149–168, 274–342; Fernando del Rey, *Paisanos en lucha. Exclusión política y violencia en la Segunda República española* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008); *Ibid.*, *Retaguardia roja*, 439–480.

⁴⁷ Archivo Histórico Nacional, FC Causa General, 1045, file 70; 1046, file 26; 1047, files 4, 30; 1048, file 12.

olutionary cries. In Quintanar de la Orden, not only was Juan Dupuy commanded to blaspheme before he was killed, but also to “cheer for communism”. In the same town, the priest Vicente Carrión was brutally beaten for refusing to shout “Long live Lenin!” On July 22, in Toledo, the parish priest Pascual Martín de la Mora was killed, like Dupuy, for refusing to cheer for communism, while on July 27, in Oropesa, the hospital chaplain César Eusebio Martín was murdered for refusing to cheer for Russia. On July 28, in Ventas con Peña Aguilera, some militiamen shot the parish priest Robustiano Nieto when he would not give “a revolutionary shout”. In Toledo on 1 September, Vicente Moreno was killed for refusing to hail Lenin. Interestingly, in all of these cases, the priests’ response was exactly the same as if they had been incited to blasphemy; they all shouted “Long live Christ the King!” The only exception was the priest in Parrillas, who, after being subjected to brutal efforts to force him to blaspheme, was eventually killed when in response to the command to say, “To your health, comrade!,” and to raise his fist in the air, he retorted: “May God grant us all health!”⁴⁸

Blasphemy, Anticlericalism and Revolution

Only in a revolutionary context is it possible to explain these events. However, beforehand, it is necessary to understand that the revolution in progress at the time operated, as noted, in a cultural system for which religion provided a framework of meaning from which to interpret reality, and a battlefield on which to resolve some of the tensions convulsing specific communities and society in general. While religion constituted a reference point that was naturally accepted, at the same time, it could be naturally be a source of protest emerging in everyday practices ranging, as seen here, from blasphemy to popular anticlericalism.⁴⁹ Moreover, the revolution fed on the categories of a political culture that also bestowed meaning on the collective action of sectors identified with the Left. The attacks against religion were led by individuals or groups familiar with the categories of radical Republican culture, one of whose main and most permanent characteristics was its vehement anticlericalism, even extending to a hatred of religion.⁵⁰ The traditional forms of irreverent, emotional behav-

⁴⁸ Cirac Estopañán, *Martirologio*, 406–407; Rivera, *La persecución religiosa*, 185, 220, 384; Sánchez Sánchez and Calvo Gómez, *Mártires*, 186, 189.

⁴⁹ Delgado, *La ira sagrada*, 49–88; Ibid., *Luces iconoclastas*, 147–176.

⁵⁰ Manuel Suárez Cortina, *El gorro frigio. Liberalismo, Democracia y Republicanismo en la Restauración* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2000), 188–190; José Álvarez Junco, *The Emergence of*

iour towards religion and its representatives overlapped and acquired new meaning in contact with modern forms of political anticlericalism.

While anticlericalism constituted a primary feature of radical Republican political culture, the myth of revolution incorporated another of its essential components. In fact, both elements came together in the belief that political and social change had to be revolutionary and could only have an effect if it involved the outright defeat of the Catholic Church. Revolution was synonymous with the revocation of ecclesiastical power and the pernicious influence of religion through the exercise of force. This close tie between extreme anticlericalism and revolution can help to explain the overwhelming outbreak of sacrophobic fury in a context interpreted by its protagonists as revolutionary, as the situation in the Republican zone in the summer and autumn of 1936 most certainly was. This extreme anticlericalism had long been pushing for the radical secularisation of Spanish society. Now the latter was brutally achieved by *faits accomplis*: in revolutionary Spain, religion was proscribed.⁵¹ The scale and scope of sacrilegious behaviour was, moreover, amplified by a framework that Bruce Lincoln has termed “millennial antinomianism,” in which laws and social constrictions ceased to operate. Social obstacles and legal impediments lost their validity, such as the provisions protecting religion in the 1932 criminal code. Additionally, priests had lost any moral authority to stop blasphemy, even if only in their own presence. In such circumstances, no one would dare to report and punish blasphemy and other forms of sacrilegious behaviour. Sacrilege and blasphemy were part of the new revolutionary normativity.

The revolution was not destined to last long, either in Spain as a whole or in the province of Toledo. In the Republican zone, the state recovered control of the situation and managed to gradually reverse it until some degree of normality was achieved around February 1937, although this “normality” did not include the reopening of churches or the reestablishment of religious worship. In the rebel zone and later in Franco’s so-called New State, the Catholic religion regained the role that, first, the Republic and, then, the revolution had denied it. Indeed, Franco’s regime went even further as far as blasphemous behaviour – and not only blasphemous behaviour – was concerned; the 1944 penal code once again included the crime of blasphemy after 94 years of being decriminalised. That provision remained in effect until its reform in 1988, ten years after the Constitution of 1978 recognized the separation of religion from the Spanish state.

Mass Politics in Spain: Populist Demagoguery and Republican Culture, 1890–1910 (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2007); De la Cueva, “The Assault”; *Ibid.*, “Violent Culture Wars”.

⁵¹ De la Cueva, “Religious Persecution”; Ledesma, “Enemigos seculares”; Vincent, “The Keys”; Thomas, *The Faith*.

Conclusion

In the revolutionary situation that developed in the Republican zone after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, enemies of the Republic and the revolution were subjected to extreme forms of violence, with special aggression reserved for the Catholic Church, long a target of the anticlerical discourse that was commonplace among members of the Spanish Left. This study of 26 micro histories from the province of Toledo has shown how blasphemy and the incitement to blasphemy was one of the forms of revolutionary violence used against the Church and its members. Once a spontaneous practice, an unconscious attribute of lower-class Spanish males, blasphemy became an intentional practice, a deliberate attack on the moral integrity of the members of the Church and, moreover, an identifying mark of antifascist revolutionaries. Blasphemy, like sacrilege, came to constitute part of the new revolutionary normativity in a situation of extreme secularisation imposed by force.

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