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Catholic Chaplains in Public Institutions: Contextual Opportunities and Institutional Inertia in Spanish Hospitals and Prisons

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Abstract

This article analyses the roles of Catholic chaplains amidst secularisation and diversification in Spain. Instead of focussing on highly politicised and controversial issues, we examine lower-profile negotiations taking place in secular public institutions. With this micro-sociological approach, we move the analysis beyond the official stand of the national Catholic hierarchy and examine everyday interactions and negotiations between front-line Catholic actors, civil servants, and religious minorities' leaders who share—and compete for—time, space, and material and symbolic resources in public hospitals and prisons. We argue that rather than resisting the changes strenuously, Catholic chaplains strategically re-define and diversify their roles by taking advantage of contextual opportunities, institutional factors, and organisational inertia. This attitude, which diverges from the more confrontational stance of the hierarchy in the public sphere, allows them to adapt to the environment and maintain their position and relevance within these institutions.

Keywords

Catholicism – chaplains – reconfiguration – roles – public institutions – Spain

1 Introduction

During the Spanish dictatorship, Catholic chaplains used to hold a central position in public institutions, such as prisons and hospitals. The privileged status of the Catholic Church in Spanish society granted chaplains authority and symbolic power within public institutions. However, the disestablishment of the Church during the democratic transition in the late seventies, together with the secularisation of society and further diversification of the religious field, created a new environment for chaplaincy. Not only the religious field changed significantly, but also public institutions underwent several transformations in the last forty years, including the professionalisation of their personnel, standardisation of procedures, and compartmentalisation of activities. This new institutional context exerted new pressures to traditional understandings of chaplains' roles.

However, despite the changing political, religious, and institutional scenario, the Catholic Church managed to legally secure the presence of chaplains in public institutions through state-church agreements. In addition, the institution of chaplaincy has remained largely intact despite the institutional pressures and new contexts. Likewise, and unlike what happened in other European countries, there has not been a formal process of standardisation and professionalisation of chaplains' tasks and duties.¹ Nor has a training program been developed and institutionalised to educate new chaplains.

Departing from this context, a number of very basic questions arise: How do Catholic chaplains legitimise their role in the new political, social, and institutional context? What do Catholic chaplains do in their daily work in public institutions, and how do they make sense of their roles? How do current institutional conditions and broader social and religious changes affect their perceptions of their work and the ways they develop it? In this article, we unpack how Catholic chaplains navigate contemporary institutional contexts and how they legitimise their figure. The overall goal is to interrogate how the Catholic Church has faced political, social, and institutional pressures and adapted to the new institutional context.

¹ Regarding the context of other European countries, see Joep van de Geer & Carlo Leget, "How Spirituality Is Integrated System-wide in the Netherlands Palliative Care National Programme," *Progress in Palliative Care* 20/2 (2012), 98–105; Kees de Groot, "The Institutional Dynamics of Spiritual Care," *Revista de Estudos da Religião* 10/1 (2010), 21–28; Margaret J. Orton, "Transforming Chaplaincy: The Emergence of a Healthcare Pastoral Care for a Post-modern World," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 15/2 (2008), 114–131.

This article contributes to the literature on the transformation of Catholicism in contemporary Europe. However, while most of the existing research has focussed either on analysing general trends or on contentious issues linked to family matters and bioethics, our article focusses on low-profile aspects.² We adopt the figure of the chaplain as a vantage point from which to examine the reconfiguration of Catholicism in the everyday functioning of public institutions. Through the figure of the chaplain, we study both the changing roles of Catholic actors in prisons and hospitals and the factors that facilitate such changes.

Other authors have also adopted the figure of the chaplain as analytical lenses to study broader social phenomena, such as the structural and ideological differences between science and religion and prison rehabilitation.³ Similarly, Winnifred F. Sullivan and Wendy Cadge and Emily Sigalow focus on chaplains because they occupy an ambiguous position as indispensable contemporary brokers or interfaces between the religious and the secular, navigating the space between their rights and the secularist constraints and obligations of state institutions.⁴ This micro-sociological approach allows us to move beyond the analysis of the official stand of the national Catholic hierarchy and look at everyday interactions and negotiations between front-line Catholic actors (mainly chaplains and lay volunteers), civil servants, and religious minorities'

- 2 On general trends, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Enzo Pace, "Religion as Communication: The Changing Shape of Catholicism in Europe," in: Nancy Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37–49; Alfonso Pérez-Agote, "Religious Change in Spain," *Social Compass* 57/2 (2010), 224–234; Philippe Portier, "Les Mutations du Religieux dans la France Contemporaine," *Social Compass* 59/2 (2012), 193–207. On family matters, see Céline Béraud & Philippe Portier (eds.), *Métamorphoses Catholiques: Acteurs, enjeux et mobilisations depuis le mariage pour tous* (Paris: Éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2015). On bioethics, see Karel Dobbelaere & Alfonso Pérez-Agote (eds.), *The Intimate. Polity and the Catholic Church: Laws about Life, Death and the Family in So-called Catholic Countries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015).
- 3 On the former, see Frances Norwood, "The Ambivalent Chaplain: Negotiating Structural and Ideological Difference on the Margins of Modern-day Hospital Medicine," *Medical Anthropology* 25/1 (2006), 1–29. On the latter topic, see Wing Hong Chui & Kevin Kwok-yin Cheng, "Self-Perceived Role and Function of Christian Prison Chaplains and Buddhist Volunteers in Hong Kong Prisons," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 57/2 (2013), 154–168.
- 4 Winnifred F. Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Wendy Cadge & Emily Sigalow, "Negotiating Religious Differences: The Strategies of Interfaith Chaplains in Healthcare," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52/1 (2013), 146–158.

leaders who share—and compete for—time, space, and material and symbolic resources in public institutions.

Our main argument is that the Catholic Church in public institutions in Spain, rather than resisting the changes strenuously—as it has done with more politicised issues mostly related to body politics, finds itself strategically redefining its position amidst the changing nature and scope of its roles. In face of the implications of state secularisation and religious diversification, Catholic chaplains adopt a pragmatic problem-solving attitude and strategically take advantage of contextual opportunities, institutional factors, and organisational inertia to acquire new roles and gain new legitimacy. In general terms, chaplains no longer assert authority and legitimacy on the grounds of dogma and the previous religious monopoly. Rather, the response to the changes and the preservation of some aspects of the prominent position is done through a discursive shift, which includes “a more flexible narrative of sociocultural identity, one able to meet the challenge of the contingency and complexity of the social environment that is deeply transforming European societies.”⁵

This article is based on a four-year (2011–2014) research project on the accommodation of religious diversity in public institutions in Spain.⁶ The project examined the macro legal and political regulations, the meso-level institutional arrangements, and the micro-negotiations taking place in the everyday life of the institutions. This qualitative study combined document analysis with semi-structured interviews.⁷ In parallel, we did observations in six hospitals and eight prisons in Spain, looking at the spatial and material presence of religion in their facilities. We also used the technique of ‘shadowing’ chaplains and religious volunteers in their daily work to observe a greater scope of interactions.⁸ All fourteen institutions are state funded and regulated and, thus, are subjected to the legal framework that defines the Spanish state as a non-confessional state, responsible for guaranteeing the right to religious freedom.

This article is structured as follows. In the next section, we offer contextual information about the structural transformations undergone by public institutions in Spain after the democratisation of the country and the constitutional

5 Pace, “Religion,” 45.

6 The project was funded by the Spanish National Research Program (2010–14, CSO2010–21248) and co-directed by Joan Estruch and Mar Giera.

7 In total we conducted 100 interviews with high-rank public officials, prison and hospital managers and staff, religious leaders and chaplains, and members of religious NGOs.

8 Barbara Czarniawska, *Shadowing: And Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2007).

disestablishment of the Catholic Church after almost forty years of dictatorship. Next, we present the main roles that Catholic chaplains play in public institutions in Spain and discuss how these have changed in the context of the secularisation and religious diversification of the country. We also point at the main factors facilitating those changes before offering some brief conclusions.

2 Public Institutions Facing Secularisation and Diversification in Spain

State deconfessionalisation in Spain meant that the “old organic order” came to its end.⁹ This happened during the democratic transition, which dissolved the symbiotic relationship between the state and the Catholic Church held during the Franco Regime—better known as ‘National Catholicism.’¹⁰ In the building of a new democratic country, the state took over many functions that were previously fulfilled by the Catholic Church, especially in areas such as education and health.

Martin Sánchez describes this process as passing from a model of “organic integration” to one of “concertation,” in which secular actors, activities, and bureaucratic procedures replace most of the functions that the Catholic Church has had in hospitals, prisons, and schools.¹¹ One of the most visible signs of these transformations is the abolition of the status of civil servants of Catholic chaplains. Also, there has been a reduction of the spatial presence of religion in these institutions, mainly visible in (a) the refurbishment of many chapels, which, particularly in prisons, only rarely are used exclusively by Catholics; (b) the removal of religious symbols in the facilities of most hospitals and prisons; and (c) the discrete place occupied by the information about chaplaincy in leaflets and noticeboards.

Along with the withdrawal of the Catholic apparatus from public institutions, the composition of the population they cater to has become more

⁹ Pace, “Religion,” 42.

¹⁰ Casanova, *Public*; Alfonso Pérez-Agote, José Santiago, & Antonio Montañés, “The Catholic Church Faces Ethical Challenges in Spain,” in: Karel Dobbelaere & Alfonso Pérez-Agote (eds.), *The Intimate. Polity and the Catholic Church: Laws about Life, Death and the Family in so-called Catholic Countries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 155–198.

¹¹ Isidoro Martín Sánchez, “El modelo actual de relación entre el Estado y el factor religioso en España,” *Revista General de Derecho Canónico y Derecho Eclesiástico del Estado* 16/8 (2008), 1–50. See also Julia Martínez-Ariño et al, “Demonopolisation and Dislocation: (Re-)negotiating the Place and Role of Religion in Spanish Prisons,” *Social Compass* 62/1 (2015), 3–21.

religiously diverse.¹² The profile of the users of public institutions reflects the increasing presence and visibility of religious minorities in Spanish society.¹³ Novel dietary regulations, religious celebrations, and rites of passage coexist with Catholic practices.¹⁴ The institutional responses to this diversification have not followed, as in other countries, a multi- or inter-faith approach. In Spanish institutions, we find tradition-specific arrangements to provide users with the chaplaincy they are constitutionally entitled to. Alongside Catholic chaplains, one can find visiting ministers from various religious minorities, such as Islam, Protestantism, Jehovah's Witness, and Orthodox churches.¹⁵ Thus, Catholicism is no longer the only option available for religious people.

However, this system is not completely equivalent for all officially recognised religious groups. Catholic chaplains stand as the most formal figure of religious care. Their salaries are paid by the state's budget, the institutions usually provide them with some facilities, such as a room and office supplies, and they enjoy a high degree of formal and informal institutional recognition.¹⁶ They are still familiarly known as "the chaplain of the prison/hospital." The rest of the religious actors, whom Sophie Gilliat-Ray calls "visiting ministers," experience restrictions and disadvantages compared to their Catholic counterparts.¹⁷ In prisons, the Ministry of Interior accredits minority religious actors only as volunteers to enter the facilities to provide religious care. In the case of hospitals, and due to the existence of free access—in which no control over who enters the hospital is applied—the great majority of non-Catholic

- 12 Manuel Gallego et al, *Andar 1 Km en línea recta: La cárcel del siglo XXI que vive el preso* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2010).
- 13 Francisco Díez de Velasco, "The Visibilization of Religious Minorities in Spain," *Social Compass* 57/2 (2010), 235–252; Julia Martínez-Ariño et al, "Inmigración, diversidad religiosa y centros de culto en la ciudad de Barcelona," *Migraciones* 30 (2011), 101–133.
- 14 Mar Grier, Julia Martínez-Ariño, & Gloria García-Romeral, "Beyond the Separation of Church and State: Explaining the New Governance of Religious Diversity in Spain," *MMG Working Papers* 14/08 (2014); Mar Grier et al, "Religión e instituciones públicas en España: Hospitales y prisiones en perspectiva comparada," *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 73/3 (2015), 1–13.
- 15 Martínez-Ariño et al, "Demonopolisation"; Grier et al, "Religión."
- 16 Mar Grier & Anna Clot-Garrell, "Banal Is Not Trivial: Visibility, Recognition, and Inequalities Between Religious Groups in Prison," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 30/1 (2015), 23–37.
- 17 Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "From 'Visiting Minister' to 'Muslim Chaplain': The Growth of Muslim Chaplaincy in Britain, 1970–2007," in: Eileen Barker (ed.), *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life: Essays in Honour of James A. Beckford* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 145–157.

ministers do not have an accreditation. Consequently, information about the number of visiting ministers entering hospitals and the activities they do is not available.

In sum, the presence and place of religion in public institutions in Spain has changed significantly in the last decades, as our empirical findings suggest. “Structural inequality” between Catholic and non-Catholic groups remains, particularly due to strongly institutionally embedded practices and routines that remain unnoticed to the public gaze.¹⁸ However, there is greater acknowledgement of the right to religious freedom of religious minorities, and some practices, such as the accreditation of visiting ministers in prisons, have been implemented. The question that remains open is what implications do these rapid transformations have for the roles of Catholic chaplains in public institutions, now that the monopoly is over? And, more specifically, how are Catholic chaplains responding to the new challenges that these situations have given rise to? In the following section we analyse the reconfiguration of Catholicism to adapt to such developments by focussing on the transformation and diversification of chaplains’ roles and the factors that facilitate those changes.

3 Taking Advantage of the Context: The Manifold Roles of Catholic Chaplains in Public Institutions

The religious and secular duties of Catholic chaplains in public institutions in Spain have evolved notably in the last decades. Currently, Catholic chaplains occupy a more marginal position and their roles are clearly delimited by law. The Constitution (1978), the Religious Freedom Act (1980), the Concordat agreements (1979), but also more general laws such as the Personal Data Protection Act (1999) or the Patient’s Autonomy Act (2002), limit their intervention in these institutions. Their activity is officially restricted to the provision of chaplaincy to those inmates, patients, families, and staff that require it explicitly, as opposed to the prior by-default chaplaincy provision for all.

Yet, the analysis of legal and administrative regulations shows only part of the story, namely the restriction of their prior overarching activity. Formally, Catholic chaplains do not have any role assigned in public institutions but

18 The concept of “structural inequality” comes from James A. Beckford, “Prison Chaplaincy in England and Wales—From Anglican Brokerage to a Multi-faith Approach,” in: Matthias Koenig & Paul de Guchteneire (eds.), *Democracy and Human Rights in Multicultural Societies* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 267–282, at 276. See also Griera & Clot-Garrell, “Banal.”

that of providing Catholic religious care to those willing to receive it. However, when we move the analysis beyond formal regulations and agreements and examine concrete institutional contexts ethnographically, we realise that the roles of Catholic chaplains go beyond that of formal chaplaincy. Despite not being explicitly recognised, these tasks are crucial to understanding the still significant presence of the Catholic Church in hospitals and prisons and the repositioning of Catholicism in Spain. As we show next, Catholic chaplains have taken advantage of contextual opportunities, institutional factors, and organisational inertia to gain new legitimacy once the religious monopoly is over and have adapted their roles to satisfy the needs of the system. Since they no longer belong to the formal organisational structure of the personnel, as they did in the past, their position needs new sources of legitimacy.¹⁹ It is our contention that this legitimisation comes from, and is framed in terms of, both “tradition” and their usefulness in aiding public institutions to meet their objectives.

We have detected four main roles that chaplains play beyond their officially attributed functions: (a) as social service providers filling welfare gaps; (b) as experts teaching staff basic literacy on religious diversity and ethical issues; (c) as jacks-of-all-trades dealing with accidental issues that fall beyond anyone’s formal domain; and (d) as religious innovators. While not all these may be completely new roles, they have gained more prominence now that traditional religious and sacramental duties are less prevalent and relevant in the daily work of chaplains.

a *Catholic Chaplains as Social Service Providers*

In most of the hospitals and prisons studied, Catholic chaplains play the role of social service providers filling welfare gaps. They develop a great variety of activities in the realm of social services. For instance, in prisons, they help the less favoured by accompanying them in their temporary licences, arranging their release procedures, putting them in contact with lawyers, and helping their families and communities. In many cases, they also provide inmates without a social network with shelter during licences and help them to cover the most basic needs of food and clothes. In hospitals, Catholic chaplains provide support to those patients without family or any support network. In many

19 César Lorenzo Rubio, “Evolución del sistema penitenciario franquista: Del redentorismo al cientifismo correccionalista. Crónica de una pretensión,” in: Angeles Barrio Alonso, Jorge de Hoyos Puente, & Rebeca Saavedra Arias (eds.), *Nuevos horizontes del pasado. Culturas políticas, identidades y formas de representación: Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea* (Santander: Ediciones de la Universidad de Cantabria, 2011), 119.

occasions, chaplains help patients to get in contact with specific NGOs that are able to help them on specific issues (e.g., providing counselling for a specific illness, helping on legal issues for undocumented migrants, or facilitating social resources for patients' family members).

However, we find differences between the roles played by chaplains in both institutions, with this role of 'social service providers' more accentuated in prisons than in hospitals. More secular third-sector organisations intervene in hospitals to deal with the necessities of patients, families, and staff, thereby leaving less room for chaplains' intervention. Moreover, the fact that prison chaplains play more social-welfare roles than their hospital counterparts is also the result of the former tending to belong more often than the latter to what Philippe Portier calls "catholicisme d'ouverture."²⁰ Chaplains in this branch of Catholicism are more distant to the hierarchy and the sacraments and closer to issues of solidarity, rights, and social commitment. Catholic chaplains in prisons belong to some religious orders that are clearly focused on the redemption of captives and social justice. Translated into contemporary terms, this means that their work in Spain mainly focusses on social work with the penitentiary population, people suffering addictions, and the disadvantaged in general. On the contrary, chaplains in hospitals used to be, and to some extent still are, more attached to a formalist and sacramentalist conception of religion, which is also closer to the hierarchy.

b Catholic Chaplains as Experts on Religious Diversity Issues

Second, Catholic chaplains also play the role of 'experts' on religious diversity issues for the staff of these institutions. 'Religious illiteracy' is a rather common characteristic of staff in secular institutions, which places Catholic chaplains in a strategic position as knowledgeable actors with resources to address new situations and requests.²¹ We personally got the first proof of this when doing fieldwork: oftentimes, when we asked for an interview to inquire about the accommodation of religious diversity, prison and hospital directors and board personnel would refer us to Catholic chaplains, whom they considered

20 Philippe Portier, "Le mouvement catholique en France au XXe siècle: Retour sur un processus de dérégulation," in: Jean Baudouin & Philippe Portier (eds.), *Le mouvement catholique français à l'épreuve de la pluralité. Enquête autour d'une militance éclatée* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires Rennes, 2002), 17–47, at 36.

21 On religious illiteracy, see Paul Bramadat, "Religious Diversity and International Migration: National and Global Dimensions," in: Paul Bramadat & Matthias Koenig (eds.), *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 1–26.

the best-informed people. All this happened without us asking for it or being asked about it. Additionally, when staff members have doubts about inmates' religious demands or any related issues, they usually ask chaplains to 'translate' them and make them more easily understandable.

In some cases, chaplains even play a facilitator role, helping members of minority faiths to practice their religion. Some quotations from the interviews we conducted with Catholic chaplains in prisons show this facilitation role when no visiting minister from the concerned religious minority was available.

There are no imams, not at all, not at all. In that prison, we had large numbers of Muslims, but there were no imams there. So, we had to... However, it was me, as chaplain, who had to get them... Well, at that time they started to celebrate Ramadan. So, we had to respect their physical spaces and look for small rooms where they could pray... Even the lamb, I requested the lamb on their behalf.²²

Yet, this situation seems to be more frequent in hospitals, where formal accreditation procedures for minority ministers are nearly inexistent, due to the open-access system. While in prisons, religious minorities' leaders have direct relation and frequent contact with the direction board—in charge of managing the accreditation procedures—in hospitals the relationship between managers and visiting ministers is almost inexistent. This facilitation role of Catholic chaplains might also be more pronounced in hospitals because the 1985 agreement between the Catholic Church and the health administration regarding the provision of Catholic chaplaincy in public hospitals included the duty of aiding those non-Catholic patients and their families who requested it.²³ It is significant that a formal agreement incorporates this reference to non-Catholic patients and families. Despite this aspect remaining very unspecific, it indicates a certain sensibility towards, and acknowledgement of, religious diversity. However, this does not necessarily entail a more opened approach to religious diversity. It can imply, as demonstrated by James A. Beckford and Gilliat, the concession of more power to the established Christian (Catholic in the case of Spain) churches over religious minorities.²⁴ In other words, rather

²² Interview prison chaplain #1 (April 2012).

²³ Gobierno de España, "Acuerdo sobre asistencia religiosa católica en centros hospitalarios públicos," Boletín Oficial del Estado (1985).

²⁴ James A. Beckford & Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in a Multi-faith Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 'Gilliat' refers to the aforementioned Gilliat-Ray, as her name was at the time of publication.

than institutionalising religious minorities chaplaincy, the religious care of patients from the religious minorities is conceived of in this agreement as a secondary task of the Catholic chaplain. This places Catholic chaplains in an informal facilitator position when patients from religious minorities request religious care. As one hospital chaplain noted:

We have our own Catholic program, we have our internal organisation, and we facilitate access to other faiths. In fact, in our information leaflet we always put: 'To the clients [*sic!*] from other religions, we offer them our friendship and help. If desired, we will inform the ministers of their church.'²⁵

The facilitating function that chaplains have in hospitals is limited, though. The open character of the institution—which allows minority representatives in—and the strategies of families and communities to assure private religious care means Catholic chaplains are often not charged with the care of religious minorities. This is well illustrated in the following quotation by a Catholic chaplain:

In the Catholic service, we are required to meet any demand of any patient from any religion. If there is a Muslim or a member of any of the Protestant branches, we have to find a person to accompany them. We have done that, but very rarely. People from other religions already have their contact details.²⁶

As becomes evident, the role of Catholic chaplains is mainly that of *facilitating* the religious practice of religious minorities rather than that of *brokering* between the minority leaders and the institution that Beckford and Gilliat identified in their study.²⁷ However, we have found isolated cases in which chaplains themselves advocate for a more inclusive policy towards religious minorities and negotiate conditions with the institution managers on behalf of their minority counterparts. This is the case of a chaplain we interviewed, who proposed the creation of an ecumenical chapel in the hospital where he worked for every Christian (not only Catholics) to use. This initiative, as he puts it, was rejected by the hospital direction board and did not receive the support from the bishop of the city: "I defended an ecumenical chapel in front of the

25 Interview hospital chaplain #2 (October 2012).

26 Interview hospital chaplain #3 (October 2012).

27 Beckford & Gilliat, *Religion*.

hospital direction and the bishopric [...]. The proposal was neither accepted by the direction nor defended by the bishopric.”²⁸

What is more interesting and telling from this story is not the fact that this concrete chaplain was acting by his own means in the interest of religious minorities. More significant is that the chaplain's stance was not in accordance with the official position of the bishop, who did not support his coreligionist idea. This simple example evidences the variety of positions and attitudes within the very core of the Catholic Church and the gap between front-line actors—who are more sensitive to the concrete needs of others and adopt more pragmatic attitudes—and the hierarchy.²⁹ This discrepancy reflects the loss of control over the organisation by the religious authority, which can be considered a sign of internal secularisation. At the same time, it evidences how dependent upon the goodwill of individuals the rights of members of minority religions are.

As we have shown, Catholic chaplains do not act as gatekeepers in the institutions we analysed in Spain. The recognition of the right to religious freedom and the disestablishment of the Catholic Church limited their role significantly. The state does not invest the Catholic Chaplaincy Service with a mediating role. Formally, the relationship between the state administration and the different religious groups is direct. However, when we look beyond the formal arrangements and analyse everyday interactions and informal agreements, we find that Catholic chaplains can rather facilitate or hinder navigation in these institutions. The scarcity of specific agreements and budgetary allocations for the development of minority religions' chaplaincy leaves gaps in the fulfilment of citizens' rights. This situation opens the ground for the Catholic Church to intervene, either as a solidarity response or as a strategy to reaffirm both some of the previous monopolistic traits and its very legitimacy in public institutions.³⁰ As the following quotation from a hospital chaplain shows, Catholic chaplains are willing to facilitate chaplaincy to other faiths, but without giving up their special situation: “We say that the official agreement for the chapels is with us [Catholic chaplains]. So, there is no objection to the fact that Catholic chapels are used by Evangelicals [...]. They are using the chapels that are at our service, so to say.”³¹ What this quotation implicitly means is that Catholicism is

28 Interview hospital chaplain #2 (October 2012).

29 Beckford, “Prison.”

30 Xabier Itçaina, “The Roman Catholic Church and the Immigration Issue: The Relative Secularization of Political Life in Spain,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49/11 (2006), 1471–1488.

31 Interview hospital chaplain #1 (March 2012).

the religion by default and any openness to other religious seems more a matter of condescendence.

c Catholic Chaplains as Jacks-of-all-trades

The third type of role that Catholic chaplains play in public institutions in Spain is what we have called, in line with Jody L. Sundt and Francis T. Cullen, "jack-of-all-trades."³² With this, we refer to the fact that Catholic chaplains deal with a number of 'accidental' issues that are beyond the professional domain of any staff member. This means dealing with multiple small issues that might not be essential for the institution but are important to its smooth functioning. Since the demand for religious care and the celebration of sacraments has declined sharply, chaplains now have more 'free time' to address issues not directly linked to their legally-established tasks. This multifaceted and often odd role is played both in the case of prisons as well as hospitals. Frequently, these tasks remain unnoticed, as they are invisible and not formally recognised.

In this regard, in prisons, and in line with the institution's primary function, Catholic chaplains encourage social peace through various means, thereby helping guardians in maintaining order. This informal role emerged often in our data, showing the great trust that prison managers and staff have on Catholic chaplains and the complementarity of their functions.³³ In a similar fashion, one of the chaplains we interviewed mentioned the request made by a guardian asking him to foster non-violence between young inmates at the Sunday mass. Another chaplain told us that the prison director once asked him to persuade an inmate to stop his hunger strike. Besides, chaplains play an even more intriguing role by interceding for inmates in front of treatment boards. They use their symbolic and social legitimacy and the consequent trust civil servants have toward them to improve inmates' conditions. Catholic chaplains find themselves amidst the trust of two confronted parties who rely on their conciliatory capacities to improve their particular situation.

However, this instrumentalisation of chaplains by the institution is only one side of the story. By fulfilling these requests, Catholic chaplains not only collaborate with the staff but also reinforce their legitimacy among staff members and prison directors at a moment where the decline in the demand for their

32 Jody L. Sundt & Francis T. Cullen, "The Role of the Contemporary Prison Chaplain," *The Prison Journal* 78/3 (1998), 271–298, at 275.

33 Julia Martínez-Ariño & Mar Griera, "Responses to Religious Diversity in Spain: Hospitals and Prisons from a Comparative Perspective," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2/1 (2016), 27–59.

sacramental roles could make their presence almost irrelevant. In a context where their formal roles have become more limited than they used to be in the past, Catholic chaplains try to keep their reputation by dealing with all those unwanted and intractable problems that would otherwise remain disregarded or solved in rather impersonal ways.

Hospital Catholic chaplains also play some roles beyond those strictly linked to the provision of chaplaincy. In such a complex institution as a hospital, where hundreds or even thousands of professionals look after an ever-changing population, a multiplicity of small tasks can remain neglected. Thus, Catholic chaplains play the role of a jack-of-all-trades there as well. They sometimes take part in ethics debates, even if they are not formally members of the ethics committees, where they are asked their opinion about particular cases or issues. They also do more concrete tasks such as supporting staff with linguistic assistance when patients and their families do not have a good command of Spanish or Catalan. This is a rather new role, since the linguistic diversification of the Spanish population (beyond Spanish and the four co-official languages) mainly resulted from immigration influxes starting in the 1990s. Catholic chaplains are also called upon when health personnel have to communicate 'bad news' to patients' families. In some cases, they are asked to do the 'dirty work' of dealing with death.³⁴ Chaplains also play the role of advisors in health matters by helping patients and their families make decisions about medical treatments. Their long experience of working in hospitals provides chaplains with some basic medical knowledge that they can make available to patients and their families in more intelligible ways.

Hospital chaplains, aware of the indispensability—yet fragility—of their roles, have diversified their capabilities. This invests them with the potential to deal with any issue or solve any problem that may appear, thus becoming a cornerstone for the daily functioning of the institution. However, despite the great variety of tasks that they can accomplish, the unofficial non-sacramental roles of Catholic chaplains in hospitals are more limited than those of prison chaplains. This can be explained by two different contextual factors. First, the strong biomedic model that dominates the functioning of hospitals constrains the role of religious actors. Their presence is appreciated when there is no one else who is able to perform a task, but in general there is a preference to keep them apart from medical issues. And second, more secular third-sector organisations intervene in hospitals to deal with the necessities of patients, families, and staff. Thus, the presence of chaplains is overshadowed by the power of

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34 Sullivan, *A Ministry*, 95.

health professionals, the severe bureaucratisation of procedures, and the multiplicity of civil society organisations.

d *Catholic Chaplains as Religious Innovators*

Finally, our research has revealed that Catholic chaplains in prisons and hospitals also adopt new strategies to attract new 'clients,' thereby ensuring their demand in a changing religious environment. Despite being still numerically anecdotal, we detected several cases of Catholic chaplains who had updated their 'portfolio' of religious practices. Some offered 'meditation' activities for inmates and others spiritual retreats for hospital staff aside from the traditional religious services they had always performed. These activities, in line with a growing presence of 'holistic spirituality' in public institutions evidences that the Catholic Church is not an exception to this particular transformation, but rather is generating innovative ways to adapt to the new and changing conditions as a strategy to avoid "losing cultural hegemony."³⁵

Everything considered, we could conclude that Catholic chaplains still remain a peculiar and relevant figure within public institutions in Spain. The secularisation of institutions has transformed their role into that of a mere "religious representative in a secularised institution of professionals."³⁶ However, as Sundt and Cullen note, this has not meant that chaplains have stepped back to the periphery of the institutions. Rather, they tend to recast the nature of their tasks and activities and make "efforts to maintain legitimacy and to negotiate a position of value outside of a strictly spiritual role."³⁷ Sullivan states that chaplains are reinventing their profession and are "finding ways to insert themselves into the late modern division of labour."³⁸ In the case of Spain, as we have shown, they act as social service providers, experts on religious diversity issues, jacks-of-all-trades, and religious innovators. We cannot consider these as 'new roles' since, for instance, Catholic chaplains have acted as 'social service providers' for centuries now. The difference is that nowadays these roles remain central when discursively justifying chaplains' position in the context of public institutions. To some extent, while historically this position was justified as 'natural'—and based on its sacramental/religious role, currently, it is vindicated through a utilitarian discourse that emphasises the chaplain's role for smoothing the functioning of public institutions.

35 Pace, "Religion," 44.

36 Sundt & Cullen, "Role," 273.

37 Ibid., 274.

38 Sullivan, *A Ministry*, 54.

4 Factors Facilitating the Redefinition of Chaplains' Roles

The secularisation of state institutions has forced the Catholic Church to reconsider its position and roles. This has been received with ambiguity and ambivalence by Catholic chaplains. A majority of the interviewees declared accepting the new situation as 'normal' in a democratic society but recurrently remember or compare the current situation with the former one. As one hospital chaplain puts it: "We go where we are required, not where no one calls us. In the past we did. In the past, we did. In the first phase [during the dictatorship], I used to visit every room, but not now."³⁹

These transformations and diversifications of the roles of Catholic chaplains in public institutions in Spain can be understood as resulting from the interplay of three main factors that chaplains, more or less strategically, take advantage of to counter the risk of marginalisation in secular institutions: (1) contextual opportunities; (2) institutional factors; and (3) organisational inertia.

First, the reinvention of the roles of chaplains in Spanish public institutions is facilitated by certain contextual opportunities, the most basic of which is the freeing of much of chaplains' working time from sacramental obligations due to the rapid secularisation of Spanish society. Moreover, the intervention of chaplains in social issues must be understood in the confluence of two factors: first, the long-lasting connections between historic churches in Europe and the welfare states created after the Second World War; and, second, the context of crisis and liberalisation of welfare, which has brought Catholic actors back to the frontline of service provision.⁴⁰ The consequences of the economic crisis have been especially noticeable in southern European countries, such as Spain, where the "welfare state was never fully developed."⁴¹ Additionally, Grace Davie points out that those are countries where the "line between state and church remains essentially fluid," which implies that it can be moved back and forth depending on the demands of the situation.⁴²

Besides, in a context of increasing religious diversity, the widespread religious illiteracy of many state agents to which we referred before places Catholic chaplains in a central position, as they are seen as the experts on religious

39 Interview hospital chaplain #2 (October 2012).

40 Regarding the first factor, see Grace Davie, "Welfare and Religion in Europe: Making the Connections," *Theology* 118/1 (2015), 10–17. On the second, see Itçaina, "The Roman."

41 Davie, "Welfare," 594.

42 Grace Davie, "A European Perspective on Religion and Welfare: Contrasts and Commonalities," *Social Policy and Society* 11/4 (2012), 589–599.

diversity issues. They may be required to act as facilitators and even intervene in the interest of religious minorities. And although their position is not that central as that of the brokers identified in other studies, they are able to use this supposed expertise to remain crucial actors in the institutions.

Second, there are institutional factors that also facilitate the redefinition and diversification of the roles of Catholic chaplains, thereby allowing them to secure their position therein. The highly professionalised and specialised nature and functioning of modern public institutions often leave 'matters of the soul' unattended. The compartmentalisation and professionalisation of many of the tasks that health professionals, for example, are expected to fulfil leave smaller and ill-defined or more challenging tasks, such as communicating bad news or translating, uncovered. The intervention of Catholic chaplains to address those issues often smooths over complex bureaucratic procedures.

Finally, a third element to better understand the significant presence of chaplains in hospitals and prisons in Spain is the fact that organisational inertia remains in force. Some traits of the complete integration between the church and state institutions in the past are still perceptible. Chaplains' social legitimacy, command of the organisational culture, and informal knowledge provides them with considerable room for manoeuvre. Moreover, the familiarity with the managers and staff helps them avoid situations, which could be potentially hostile.⁴³ This resembles what Irene Becci calls the "institutional neutralisation of Christianity," understood as a way to regulate religious diversity in which the position of Christianity is not questioned but rather presented as universal and integrated in the institutional structure.⁴⁴ Many staff members consider Catholic chaplains in Spanish institutions as regular staff members, which invests them with legitimacy to intervene beyond their strictly religious functions. Moreover, a long record of mutual trust, non-conflictual relations, and adaptation to the institutional functioning reinforces this role.

5 Conclusions

Traditional Christian churches in Europe have neither remained passive to the processes of secularisation and religious diversification nor have they always

43 Griera & Clot-Garrell, "Banal."

44 Irene Becci, "Institutional Resistance to Religious Diversity in Prisons: Comparative Reflections Based on Studies in Eastern Germany, Italy and Switzerland," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28/1 (2015), 5–19, at 6.

resisted them fiercely, as has been the case with body politics. In the previous sections, we have shown that the Catholic Church is a living organisation that responds in different ways to socio-political changes. In some cases, particularly in southern Europe, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has had very virulent reactions to policies in the areas of family and bioethics, with the demonstrations in France and Spain being the most representative. But what is the attitude of the Catholic Church when the issues at stake are not as controversial? How do front-line Catholic actors respond to socio-religious transformations in their daily work?

By studying the roles of Catholic chaplains in public institutions in Spain, we have been able to grasp how the Catholic Church finds itself amidst an on-going process of redefining its position and tasks in the context of state secularisation and religious diversification. Our research has shown that far from adopting a stance of resignation and becoming completely irrelevant, the Catholic Church is generating different strategies to face the deconfessionalisation and demonopolisation of state institutions. With the decline in the number of requests for the celebration of sacraments and traditional religious services, much of the working hours of chaplains have been freed and are now spent in other tasks that serve legitimising the chaplains' presence in institutions.

The various ways in which Catholic chaplains deal with the advancement of secularising trends and the increasing presence and visibility of religious minorities show the combination of adaptive attitudes with subtle resistance to change. As Frances Norwood puts it for her study in hospitals, chaplains "make strategic choices that foster their presence in an otherwise foreign and not entirely welcoming environment."⁴⁵ In this regard, Catholicism can be understood in Enzo Pace's terms as a mobile tradition: 'mobile' in the sense that it is adapting and conforming to changing conditions and 'tradition' in the sense that it tries to keep some of the well-established acquired privileges by minimising the centrality of traditional religion (i.e., the performance of sacraments).

Traditional religious authority is no longer possible in the current context of Spain. In our research, chaplains have shown their ability to adapt to the new public and to take advantage of the new contextual opportunities, institutional factors, and organisational inertia. By way of being suppliers of social services, experts on religious diversity issues, jacks-of-all-trades, and religious innovators, Catholic chaplains have been able to avoid being relegated to a completely marginal position in public institutions. In addition, the Catholic

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45 Norwood, "The Ambivalent," 21.

Church's vast social, economic, and cultural resources—especially in comparison with those of religious minorities or with those of the public institution in a context of severe economic crisis—have widely contributed to the assertion of its position in these institutions. Catholic chaplains have updated their skills and roles and broadened and diversified their offer to adjust them to the current situation and to the expectations of the population. Traditional Catholic activities, such as the celebration of mass and other sacraments, have in some cases left room to multi-faith activities and even activities related with holistic spiritualities lead by Catholic chaplains. Moreover, chaplains are moving beyond the sacramentalist approach, in a move that Norwood refers to as a strategy of “downplaying their connection to religion.”⁴⁶ Instead, chaplains legitimate their activity in terms of the effects that their presence can have on the wellbeing of patients or the repentance of inmates. Dogma no longer constitutes the basis for their work, which gains presence in the area of social services. Additionally, rather than confronting religious minorities, in some cases, mainly in hospitals, but also sometimes in prisons, they act as facilitators. This helps them keep and legitimise their position.

This goes in line with Claire de Galember's analysis of the attitudes of the Catholic Church towards the growth of Islam in France.⁴⁷ De Galember argues that instead of facing the growth of Islam in terms of rivalry, the Catholic Church adopts an attitude of compassion towards the marginalised. This works as an opportunity to assert the Church's hegemonic position in front of the religious others but also to reposition itself in front of the state. This also accounts for the situation in Spanish hospitals and prisons, where Catholic chaplains find new opportunities to assert their relevance in front of the secular power of institutions and in front of other religious groups. This strategy contradicts the controversial and defiant position that the Catholic Church has taken in the public sphere in recent years in Spain.⁴⁸ The analysis of the roles of Catholic chaplains in low-profile issues shows the relevance of distinguishing between what has been named “Catholicisme d'ouverture” versus “Catholicisme d'identité.”⁴⁹ In the cases we studied, we have found a rather

46 Ibid., 19.

47 Claire de Galember, “Intégration des musulmans en France et en Allemagne: Le poids de l'intermédiaire catholique,” in: Alain Dierkens (ed.), *Pluralisme religieux et laïcités dans l'Union européenne* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1994), 109–121.

48 Susana Aguilar, “Fighting Against the Moral Agenda of Zapatero's Socialist Government (2004–2011): The Spanish Catholic Church as a Political Contender,” *Politics and Religion* 5/3 (2012), 671–694.

49 Portier, “Le mouvement.”

open Catholicism that “offers a more distanced relation to the hierarchy” in contrast to a militant Catholicism of identity.⁵⁰

In light of these results, it would be tempting to conclude that the Catholic Church, through its chaplains, is succeeding in passing from the previous to the current social and political context. However, the transition from a mono-confessional to a secular and diverse situation is complex and full of struggles and subtle resistances. All this shows that the reconfiguration of Catholicism in Spain, as elsewhere, is an on-going process, which takes different shapes and nuances in different contexts and moments depending on the actors involved, the issues at stake, and the specific contextual conditions.

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50 Xabier Itçaina, “The Crisis as a Constrained Opportunity? Catholic Organisations and Territorial Welfare in the Basque Country and Emilia-Romagna,” *Religion, State & Society* 43/2 (2015), 118–132, at 119.

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