

First Steps towards Equality: Higher Education for Women in Spain (1910-1936)

Abstract

A social and intellectual conflict was waged between Catholics and secularists in Spain at the turn of the 20th century. In 1910, following forty long years of struggle, women were finally granted access to the university system. This fact positioned women at the heart of the dispute between the two competing schools of thought, both of which supported the intellectual development of women as an essential part of their respective educational projects for political and social renewal. Nonetheless, the vision of women held on both sides fell far short of recognizing the suitability of women for participation in public life. On the basis of a close reading of the research literature in this field (84 works), this article shows that the educational projects advanced by both groups were remarkably similar, given that each drew on similar prejudices regarding women.

Keywords: Women, University, Public Sphere, Spain 1910–1936

Introduction

The chronological coordinates of this paper are 1910, the year in which Spanish women were granted access to the higher education system, and 1936, the year in which the Spanish Civil War broke out. The Civil War was a watershed in contemporary Spanish history, marking a definitive before and after: any development at the time was crudely interrupted, and if it resurfaced following the conflict, it did so in a radically different way. No sense of clear continuity may be discerned.

Each of the two prevailing schools of thought, which might be referred to in broad terms as Catholic and secularist, made a distinctive contribution to the area of higher education for women. In this regard, Pedro Poveda and the Teresian Institute, founded in approximately 1913, were pioneers in the Catholic world. The Free Education Institution (FEI) played a parallel role in the secular context.

When women first accessed the university system in 1910, they found themselves – unwillingly – in the eye of the political storm that had already begun to divide the country: the conviction that education alone could bring about political and social renewal in Spain and save the country from its long decline. The university system was subject to the same profound decadence that affected the country as a whole. Women's access to the system came at the worst possible moment, the same moment in which a process of gradual recovery was begun. This recovery was the result of the dynamic contribution of a number of newly-established bodies under the auspices of the FEI: the Council for Further Studies (1907); the Student Residence (1910); the Female Student Residence (1915); the Center for Historical Studies; and the National Institute of Physics and Chemistry. The objective was to renew the university system in every area: research, student education and training, and academic exchange at an international level.

Description of the two parties to the dispute

As an institution, the FEI posed a fundamental problem to a large number of Spanish people: its religious neutrality; and, moreover, the conviction prevalent among many of its personnel that the backwardness of Spain might well be attributable largely to the cultural influence of the Catholic Church. The Institute was founded in 1876 by a number of renowned university professors (Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Nicolás Salmerón, Gumersindo de Azcárate) who were in profound disagreement with the government of the time in relation to the political and religious dogmas the latter wished to impose in the university system. Having been deprived of their academic posts, their first thought was to establish a free university. However, that ambition lay beyond their reach and means, and they resigned themselves to the establishment

of a college. The FEI center was a revolutionary development in the Spanish education system, drawing on pedagogical trends then current in other European and American countries and deferring to relatively unconventional methods. The FEI approach soon had a significant impact on Spanish intellectual life. At the turn of the 20th century, for example, the University of Oviedo was a hotbed of FEI thinking, through the University Extension program, the objective of which was to spread the high culture of university education to a wider public. The influence of the FEI was amplified in a decisive way by the contribution of Francisco Giner, who recovered his professorial position at the Central University in Madrid in 1881. The sphere of influence of the FEI expanded rapidly at the start of the 20th century, shaping to a significant extent the political design of the Spanish education system at all levels. Its contribution to university life has already been noted; but it also became involved in the education of teachers through the foundation of the School of Higher Studies in Teaching (1909); the General Council of Primary Education (1911), which oversaw the education of young children; and, finally, the establishment of the Institute–School (1918) in the area of secondary education.

In the Catholic world, Pedro Poveda Castroverde and his new foundation (the Teresian Institute, c. 1913) inaugurated one of the most significant developments in the field of education. Poveda deferred to the prevailing current of thought in his time: increased state control of education. While the State may have favored secular or religiously neutral initiatives, the provision of Christian education depended on its delivery through the same established structures. Poveda observed and studied the FEI, and made contact with a number of the most important figures involved; he recognized the impetus for renewal it embodied; and felt that, with the exception of a few particular points, the FEI's pedagogical approach was not incompatible with Christianity. He did not regard the relationship between the modern world and the Church as one of inevitable conflict. In his writings, he proposed the establishment of a counterpart to the FEI: the Catholic Education Institute (1911). Given the climate in Catholic circles at the time, this initiative was doomed to failure, but the inspiration behind it gave rise to the foundation of the Teresian Institute, comprising only women who committed themselves to intellectual development in a determined way.

Hence, the entry of the first women to the university system became a clear example of the real conflict between the 'two Spains': on the one hand, liberal Spain, which drew on the philosophical legacy of Krausse¹ and the 1868 Revolution, open to the pedagogical influence and life experience reflected in different trends then current throughout the world, and led by the leading lights of the FEI; and, on the other hand, traditional, avowedly Catholic, Spain, which initiated interesting pedagogical developments of its own, not the least of which was the Teresian Institute itself. There was simply no way for the young women then registering freely in university studies for the first time to avoid this conflict: circumstances had placed them in the eye of the storm.

The appeal of female potential

Between 1871 and 1910, young Spanish women had waged a difficult war with the political authorities over access to the higher education system: forty years of uncertain progress, marked by prohibitions, official warnings, bureaucracy, lengthy paperwork, and arbitrary administrative decisions taken in the main by both conservative and progressive governments. Nonetheless, 77 women in all achieved the impossible during that time: university registration. 53 of them completed their studies and were awarded either degrees or doctorates. Their success belonged to them alone (Flecha, 1996). When women were excluded from the centers of power, including the university, they could rely only on their own strength. However, as women began to enter the public sphere, both schools of thought appeared to be equally committed to drawing on their potential.

Nevertheless, this commitment cannot be attributed to the significance of the phenomenon in itself. On the contrary, in fact: Spain was one of the last countries in the

Western world to grant women access to higher education, even later than both the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1897) and the German Empire (1908). The rate of illiteracy among women was 65.8% in 1910 (Capel, 1982, 363). Motivated more likely than not by the nobility of the end in itself, both Catholics and secularists sought to support the new phenomenon of female university students; at the same time, the outstanding opportunity it implied for their own objectives was also borne closely in mind. Higher education for women would facilitate – or, at least, would not impede – the renewal of Spanish society.

It should be noted that the reasons which prompted Fernando de Castro² to promote the first such educational initiatives for women in the 19th century were shaped by the desire to prevent them from exercising inappropriate influence on their husbands, given the Church-centered traditional frame of mind attributed reflexively to all women at that time. Underlying this development, then, were clear political motives, as a number of scholars have pointed out (Scanlon, 1976, 32; Vázquez Ramil, 2001, 303; Cacho, 1962, 206-210). Indeed, those involved in the FEI – Giner, in particular – regarded men as too deformed by the pernicious legacy of traditional education to be able to lead Spain out of its centuries-long apathy. The role of women, Giner thought, was to fill this niche: virgin territory, fertile soil for new ideas, clear ground that did not need to be weeded of prior planting (Vázquez Ramil, 2001, 48-50).

Likewise, Poveda clearly saw the role of women in a similar light. His initiative was wholly new in the field of Catholic social thought: to educate and train lay teachers to work in an official capacity in state-run structures; and, moreover, to organize them to help one another, to engage in ongoing training in new pedagogical methods, to provide them with the kind of thorough-going professional and Christian formation that would enable them, using both science and doctrine, to change the face of Spain. Such a new approach called for equally new ground, virgin territory. In their personal, often lonely, struggles, women were well placed to progress in knowledge. Poveda worked first and principally with female teachers, but his overriding objective was higher education (Pego, 2006, 241, 249-255; González, 2006, 138; Velázquez, 1987, 13-16; Velázquez, 1996, 88-89). Also pertinent in this regard was the Council's establishment of the School of Higher Studies in Teaching in Madrid in 1909, the most modern and best equipped educational center in Spain at that time, generally described as a university-level institution. Indeed, given that it was more difficult to register in the School than in any other university faculty, its real standing may well have been higher still.

Catholics and secularists: a shared view of the role of women

Nevertheless, both schools of thought faced certain difficulties in dealing with the education of the 'new' women then accessing higher education. In the Catholic world, for example, Poveda's intention to "educate ladies" was regarded as, at best, eccentric and, at worst, a serious risk. That science would destroy feminine piety and lead young girls away from God was a very widely held opinion at that time (Velázquez, 2002, 20,22,43-45,47; Velázquez, 1997, 88-89). With regard to the institutions established by the FEI, the initiatives designed for the growing number of female university students, such as the Female Student Residence, were always less well equipped than the corresponding facilities for men and, in the main, relegated to a rank of secondary importance in the general organizational structure (Mangini, 2001, 54).

These facts should come as no real surprise. During the opening third of the 20th century, including the Republican years, Spanish women were effectively 'worthless' in social terms. Such an attitude may be surprising, annoying or even repulsive to the contemporary mind. However, at that time, the prevalent social thinking, shared by almost all, including those who regarded themselves as free-thinkers and the vast majority of women themselves, consisted of the belief that the essential role of women comprised marriage, motherhood and the education of their children. That marriage, fatherhood and the education of their children might serve as an equal definition of the essential role of men was an idea that had not yet occurred to

anyone. These private occupations of women were regarded as so all-consuming as to negate any other social function that a woman might perform. Further study was open only to unmarried women and widows, enabling those in such situations to support their families financially. That promising academic careers for women in Spain – for example, that of Dorotea Barnés (Magallón, 1999, 278-290)³, who was educated entirely in line with FEI principles – came to a sudden dead end after marriage is undeniable, a situation that was regarded as absolutely normal. The outstanding university women of that time were unmarried: Victoria Kent, Clara Campoamor and María de Maeztu; or married but childless, like María Zambrano; or perhaps, rarely, married with children, like Maria Goyri, wife of Menéndez Pidal. The latter case is more confusing than enlightening. Goyri was a Doctor of Philosophy, Arts and Letters, a teacher at the Institute–School, who carried out joint research with her husband throughout her career. However, their articles and books were not publicly co-authored; only her husband’s name, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, was appended to the texts.

That the Church and Catholics in general had a traditional view of the role of women is a commonplace observation. To discover that this view was shared by liberal, progressive and free-thinking men is shocking. According to his own daughter, José Ortega y Gasset felt a certain unease with regard to the idea of work by women (Mangini, 2001, 77-78). Moreover, no women ever attended the gatherings organized by the *Revista de Occidente* – not even María Zambrano, for whom Ortega had special intellectual respect.

Ortega y Gasset saw women as confused in mind, inferior in their humanity to men. This view may be inferred from the essay *El hombre y la gente* (Man and the People), written relatively late in his career:

In the presence of Woman, we men immediately see a creature who, on the level pertaining to humanity, is on a somewhat lower rung of life than our own. No other being with this dual condition exists: human being, and being human in a way inferior to men (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, 179-180)⁴.

In the same book, Ortega himself recounted an anecdote from his youth, set in the 1910s, before the Great War:

When I was young, I traveled back on a huge transatlantic ship from Buenos Aires to Spain. Among the passengers on board were a number of North American women, young and very beautiful. Although my dealings with them were never very close, it was clear from the way that I spoke to each of them that I addressed her as a woman in full possession of her feminine attributes. One of them felt a little offended, as a North American. It would appear that Lincoln had not striven to win the war of Secession so that I, a young Spanish man, could feel free to treat her as a woman. At that time, North American women were so modest that they felt there was something greater than “being a woman”. I know only men and women. Since I have the good fortune to be addressing, not a man, but a woman – and a beautiful woman at that – I behave as is befitting. That girl had suffered the rationalist education of her time in some College [...] (Ortega y Gasset, 1957, 176-177).

Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, who worked closely with Francisco Giner, exhibited a similar anxiety with regard to the possibility of a female higher education teacher giving classes in a male institution, given the fact that “the relative inferiority of woman prevents her from playing a part in the education of (male) teachers” (Scanlon, 1976, 65).

Emilia Pardo Bazán was appointed professor of Contemporary Literature in Neo-Latin Languages by Royal Decree on the 11th May 1916. The express will of Alfonso XIII was articulated in this development, given the unquestionable literary merits of the countess. However, the decision was effected against the opinion and unanimous (negative) vote of all the professors at the Central University. Moreover, the students boycotted her classes, refusing to attend lectures given by ‘Ms. Emilia’. Professors belonging to the FEI were also involved in this

public repudiation campaign. A letter from Cossío to the author clearly reflects this enlightened and liberal man's attitude to Pardo Bazán's presence at the university:

My congratulations, then, since you like – I think *to you* in bad taste – to go to the University [...].

But, my dear Emilia, allow me, under the protection of our long friendship and in a humble echo of what I am sure that noble spirit [Giner] who is gone from us forever would say, ask you: given that it is not for all the fuss, which cannot nor should not interest you, do you not think that your glory, the true glory, your own, the glory that you yourself have created, which no one can either grant or take away, which the world will remember at all times and in all places, would be a much greater glory without Councils or Academies or Universities [...]?(Jiménez Fraud, 1989, 47-48).

It should also be noted that, in general, there was little or no contact between the young women at the Female Student Residence and the young men at the Student Residence. The fathers of the female residents, many of them liberal and agnostic, insisted on the protection of their daughters' reputations and good manners and customs, in the most traditional sense of those terms. This has led a number of commentators to conclude that life at the Female Student Residence was wholly governed by what they refer to as "the principle of morality"(Ribagorda, 2005, 49; Pérez-Villanueva, 1990, 92, 333; Cuesta, 2003, 453; Mangini, 2001, 82). Ribagorda provides an illuminating example of the different mentalities at the FEI with regard to the education of men and women, respectively:

Unlike in the Student Residence, where guest speakers included international figures of such standing as Einstein, Tagore, H. G. Wells, Bergson and Keynes, the lectures given at the Female Student Residence were always led by Spanish intellectuals [...]. Many of the lectures organized there were on general culture, but many others were on literary topics or were poetry recitals, whereas there were relatively few lectures on scientific, anthropological, philosophical, political, etc. themes, especially in the early years. The prevalence of literary occasions was congruent with the mentality of the time, which regarded music and literature as important elements in the education of a 'young lady', while other types of knowledge such as those mentioned above were not considered so important for their education. There was a remarkable difference, then, between the cultural programs organized at the two residences, with a reduced range of opportunities available to women (Fernández Urtasun/Ascunce, 2006, 298)

Madame Curie, the outstanding woman – and scientist – of her generation, stayed at the Female Student Residence when she visited Spain in 1931, but she shared her knowledge with others at the Student Residence, not at its female equivalent (Ribagorda, 2005, 52).

Male fear of the social influence of women

Further factors helped to shape the mentality outlined above. There was a collective male fear of the social influence of women. This nascent fear may be traced in three articles published by Ramón Ezquerro in *Renovación Española* in 1925: it was feared that given its focus on cultural life the Faculty of Philosophy, Arts and Letters would fall into the hands of women in just a few short years; and some held that female university students, while willing and committed, in general lacked the intellectual talents that were in the natural gift of men. Women devoted themselves to what was accessible and memorable, avoiding anything that might involve greater speculative effort, perhaps because they were not fully capable of independent thought. In this context, the following question arose: how was the entire cultural life of a nation to be guided without the aid of a speculative mind? Another argument, moreover, was that women's participation in professional life reduced the number of positions available to men. Surprisingly, the author of these articles was not opposed to university education for women. He simply sought to articulate ideas commonly and unquestioningly held in the society of his time

(Ezquerria, 1926, **44**, 490-494; **45**, 532-536; **46**, 629-632). What is most significant in this regard is that this anxiety is expressed when the presence of female students in university life had only just begun. The information contained in the tables below makes that fact abundantly clear.

1. Changes in the total number of female student registration figures, by university. Total numbers. 1920s.

UNIVERSITY	1919-1920	1927-1928
Barcelona	54	229
Granada	24	124
La Laguna	-	14
Madrid	174	799
Murcia	11	20
Oviedo	4	31
Salamanca	10	70
Santiago de C.	10	116
Seville	13	46
Valencia	18	53
Valladolid	14	56
Zaragoza	13	123

Source: Capel, 1982, 469.

2. Percentages of men and women in the Spanish university system. 1920s.

Academic year	No. of men	No. of women	Total	% men	% women
1919-20	21,813	345	22,158	98.5	1.5
1929-30	31,813	1,744	33,557	94.8	5.2

Source: original to this article, based on Capel, 1982, 473 and Barrera Peña/López Peña 1983,108.

3. Women in different university degree programs. Total numbers. 1920s.

Academic year	Law	Medicine	Humanities and Social Sciences	Sciences	Pharmacy
1919-20	9	58	80	114	81
1920-21	10	75	111	150	112
1921-22	13	96	154	200	149
1922-23	14	106	164	245	207
1924-25	18	131	261	274	350
1927-28	71	166	441	395	596
1929-30	86	199	460	222	777

Source: original to this article, based on Vázquez Ramil, 2001, 121; Capel, 1982, 473 and Ezquerria, 1926, **44**, 493.

At the end of his work, Ezquerria makes reference to the heart of the problem, what he calls “the effort neutralization factor”: marriage. The girls married and did not practice their professions. They paid no attention to their university qualification, he added, and “marriage is the path that most will follow, since all are inclined [to marry], showing that intention more or less openly [...] undoing any results that might be expected from this new movement [women’s access to university].”

His final conclusion was based on no evidence, but reflects precisely the sharply defined social attitude towards women, which stood in no need of proof and was widely shared:

Woman cannot escape the biological destiny set out for her, and which will overcome any temptation to rise above or devalue it. Her place in the home will continue to be indispensable, even for erudite women, and she will not be able nor should she refuse the responsibilities that fall to her in the perpetuation of the race and in the raising and education of children, the importance of which need not be emphasized here and which remain incompatible with an assiduous and constant commitment to the development of a professional career (Ezquerro, 1926, 46, 632).

To return to the figures presented above: they cannot be read in objective terms as causes for concern regarding the advancement of women. At 5%, the proportion of female university students was almost negligible. Besides, many such students were registered externally: that is, they did not attend lectures, and only visited the university to take examinations. Moreover, fields of study such as Law, which led to key posts in public life, were hardly ever chosen by female students. The reason for this is that women were prohibited from taking the civil service examinations that regulated access to work in the administrative organs of the State; private practice alone was open to them. As women, they could not expect to attract too many private clients. In fact, the two female lawyers who opened an office in Madrid in 1925 (Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor)⁵ made their new profession compatible with the jobs they had carried out before: the former was a manager at the Institute–School; the latter had qualified for a civil service post in the Ministry for Public Instruction some time previously, working on classes for adults; she also contributed to a number of newspapers.

This ‘natural’ distrust of women did not change with the advent of the Second Republic. Indeed, to a certain extent it might be said that the bitter debate regarding women’s suffrage disclosed the fear and anxiety provoked by the real and specific influence of the so-called weaker sex on national, public life. There was a firm conviction that the educational deficit among women, and the consequent conservative mindset, would put the life of the new regime at risk. The left feared it; the right celebrated it. For reasons of political prudence, many left-wing men thought that women should be denied the vote at that time, although as a matter of principle such a position was simply untenable. Clara Campoamor argued the case for women’s suffrage in the House of Parliament and won that right. As a result, given the victory of the right-wing in the following elections, she was made a scapegoat by all those on the left, treatment that she would never forgive or forget. And although the Popular Front came to power soon afterwards, Campoamor was already dead to political life. Her mortal sin, as she herself recalled on many occasions, was to have ensured a woman’s right to vote. The other two female representatives in during that parliamentary session – Victoria Kent y Margarita Nelken – were opposed to women’s suffrage (Capel, 1975, 47-63; Campoamor, 2006; Fagoaga/Saavedra, 2007, 39; Gutierrez Vega, 2001, 28, 73, 90).

The educational curricula at the University Residence of the Teresian Institute and the FEI’s Female Student Residence

Given such a deep-rooted attitude regarding the unsuitability of women for participation in certain areas of social life, that the educational approaches adopted in the two main initiatives designed to support the position of women in higher education – Poveda’s Teresian Residence and the FEI’s Female Student Residence – were so similar is unsurprising.

The former was founded in Madrid in March 1914; the latter, also in Madrid, in September 1915. The Teresian establishment had not gone unnoticed at the School of Higher Studies in Teaching. During the summer of 1915, while the opening of the Female Student Residence was being finalized, José de Castillejo (secretary to the Council for Further Studies) and María de Maeztu led an attempt to unify the two endeavors. The attempt was unsuccessful

because Poveda understood that such a joint venture would spell the end of his independent commitment to educating women in the Christian spirit. This initial failure did not undermine the mutual respect in which Maeztu and Carmen Cuesta (the director of the Teresian Residence from 1918 onwards) held one another, although each also strove to convince the other of her own position (González, 2006, 122-125; Gómez del Manzano, 1991, 167; Velázquez, 1996, 145-148, 152-160, 182, 185; Velázquez, 1997, 15-17, 31-35; Velázquez, 2002, 25; Sáiz, 1929, 121-122). Both Residences sought to generate a climate of intelligent culture and mutual support, facilitating contact with older, educated women who might help the younger. Books, languages, cultural activities, conferences, and the intellectual life in Madrid at the time were prioritized. While prestigious figures from Spanish intellectual circles were welcomed to the Female Student Residence, the young women at the Teresian Residence visited all the cultural crossroads of the capital – the Atheneum and the National Library (Zulueta/Moreno, 1993; Velázquez, 2003; Pedro Poveda, 1988).

The fees charged at the Residences were very similar from the 1920s onwards, which reflects the fact that both were drawing on the same social target market. Moreover, certain phrases regarding the spirit of life in the residence were repeated almost word for word in both places: a family atmosphere, for example – a Christian family, at the Teresian Residence; a well-organized (in moral terms) Spanish family, María de Maeztu would say of the Female Student Residence on numerous occasions (Pérez-Villanueva, 1990, 88).

There were also similarities between those who supported the two Residences. A striking example in this regard is provided by Rafaela Ortega y Gasset, the noted philosopher's sister, whose house adjoined a number of the apartments first used by the Teresian Residence, to which she provided generous support. Rafaela also worked with María de Maeztu, not in any official capacity but in a regular way and without any sense of contradiction. In addition, the Ortega Munilla family (including Rafaela's parents) gave its entire library on loan to the students at the Teresian Residence and was on very friendly terms with the residents and teachers there, as well as with Pedro Poveda himself. Rosario Menéndez Pidal, the sister of the renowned writer, likewise played an active part in the life of both the Teresian Residence and the institutions established by the FEI. At a governmental level, liberal authorities supported the FEI, while conservative authorities provided similar support to the Teresian Institute (Velázquez, 2002, 92, 109, 111-112, 136, 145; Velázquez, 2003, 54).

A number of commentators have criticized the strict discipline exercised at the Teresian Residence, which they interpret in light of the Catholic nature of the educational project. However, discipline at the FEI's Female Student Residence was no less strict. The documentary evidence for the strict regime of life at the latter, the careful regulation of each activity and the general sobriety of tone is abundant. (Indeed, such features have been read by some critics as exemplifying the Puritanism at the heart of the FEI project.) If total freedom was the only norm at the Student Residence (for men), such male license was in stark contrast to the sheer number and severity of the rules in force at the Female Student Residence. Thus, even in the absence of religion, in a scrupulously neutral environment, strict discipline constituting a regime governing daily life might be unquestioningly imposed: this was what the fathers demanded for their daughters (Ribagorda, 2005, 49-50; Pérez-Villanueva, 1990, 328-337, 355-358; Vázquez Ramil, 2001, 241-242).

That the public influence of the Female Student Residence was more far-reaching than that of the Teresian Residence is undeniable. Given the contribution of the International Institute and the fact that it was a member-organization of the School of Higher Studies in Teaching, with all the intellectual and political prestige such participation implied, the Female Student Residence was a focal point for feminine culture throughout the years of its existence. The reverberations of all the avant-garde movements of the 1920s echoed within its walls. The (female) intellectuals, poets and writers of the time were involved in the Residence in one way or another: Ernestina de Champourcin, Concha Méndez, María Zambrano, Gabriela Mistral (later a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature), Carmen Conde, María Goyri, María Moliner and, it goes without saying, Victoria Kent, the woman who for many years held the highest post

ever achieved by a woman at that time in Spanish political life (Director General of the Prison Service) (Pérez-Villanueva, 1989, 112, 180; Mangini, 2001, 91-92; Fernández Urtásun/Asunce, 2006, 41, 271, 274, 303; Franco, 2007, 66-71; Marset, 2004, 348).

Life at the Residence was enriched by the contribution of the International Institute through the presence of teachers and students from abroad, access to its extraordinary library, the installation of the Foster Laboratory and, above all, the provision of scholarships enabling study at universities in North America. The Residence was also a focal point for the Spanish female university movement, linked through María de Maeztu to the wider world (Zulueta, 1984; Maillard, 1990, 11-13; Magallón, 1999, 163-202).

Despite the public significance of the Female Student Residence, the fact that female Spanish university students remained in a tiny minority should be borne in mind. At the beginning of the 1930s, only 6% of university students were women, which would suggest that the female university movement was almost entirely invisible. The most shocking figures in this context are those relating to illiteracy. As late as 1930, almost half of all Spanish women (47.4%) still did not know how to read or write; this was the real crux in the relationship between women and education. Perhaps for this very reason the Second Republic set raising the literacy rate as a high priority. The school groups set up by the newly-installed authorities prioritized the education of girls, who suffered the consequences of the lack of education most severely. While the number of girls in secondary education increased considerably, from 17.1% in 1931 to 46.2% in 1936, the proportion of female university students grew more slowly, from 6% in 1930 to 8.8% in 1936, and the Republic paid relatively little attention to this area. On the other hand, the Republican authorities were much more committed to reaching a wider female public, in order to provide them with a level of general education that would enable them to make a living (Barrera Peña/López Peña, 1983, 108-109; Cuesta, 2003, 419, 439, 447, 456-457). The mission of the Female Student Residence was altered slightly from 1934 onwards, offering accommodation – in a modern facility built by cooperative effort – to a large number of girls interested in such general education (Pérez-Villanueva, 1990, 67-68, 132-135, 319-320; Vázquez Ramil, 2001, 171, 181, 199-227, 235-238, 308-309).

The touchstone: religion

Far from being atheists, the men who established and promoted the Free Education Institution were men of religious spirit. Nevertheless, they did not practice or support any particular religion, and certainly not Catholicism. They described themselves as neutral. The defining feature of their initiatives, including the Female Student Residence, was “secularity”.

One might wonder, however, if that secular objective was achieved at the Residence. María de Maeztu herself was Catholic, and most of the residents attended Sunday Mass. The testimony in this regard is provided by Matilde Landa Vaz, a resident at Fortuny during the first half of the 1920s. Matilde came from a well-off, cultured family – free-thinkers, university graduates with ties to the Free Education Institution. Her parents’ marriage (1888) was a civil marriage only, which was very rare for the time; and their daughter, born in 1904, was not baptized. Matilde’s father openly declared his membership of the Masons and was the highest public representative of Ruiz Zorrilla and Salmerón’s Progressive Republican Party in Badajoz. Matilde and her siblings were educated in line with the principles articulated by Krause and reflected in the FEI. As a young girl, she began to correspond with Manuel Bartolomé Cossío’s daughter, Natalia, and the two became close friends. She moved to the Female Student Residence in 1923 and was scandalized by the religiosity of María de Maeztu and the other girls who lived there, all of whom, she said, except for a small group, attended Mass. In a letter to one of her sisters, dated 31st October 1931, she wrote:

The worst thing about the Res is this false clericalism they've set up here; except for five girls, all the others go to mass, communion, etc. ... with the director leading the charge. Mr. Cossío was astonished when I told him that María de Maeztu goes to mass! (Ginard, 2005, 25-26).

There is evidence that other women involved in the FEI were practicing Catholics. Antonina Rodrigo said of María Goyri, who gave lectures and worked regularly at the Residence, that she used to go to Mass at six o'clock in the morning, and nobody in the house made anything of it because she was absolutely private where spiritual matters were concerned (Rodrigo, 1979, 32-53).

Although they may not have practiced their religion regularly, a number of the most politically active women in left-wing parties, such as Victoria Kent, acknowledged their Catholic background. According to Zenaida Gutierrez Vega, Kent was a believer, although she practiced no religion. Kent once said: "I am Catholic, I was born Catholic. I don't practice but I definitely believe in God"⁶. In 1939, Gabriela Mistral wrote to her: "You believe without knowing it, like all intuitive people"; and again, ten years later: "there are many ways to believe, and one way is to doubt". Gutierrez Vega concluded that Kent's religion consisted in the practice of charity; her ideal was to serve her neighbor (Gutierrez Vega, 2001, 17) – an authentic, and radically Christian, ideal.

María Zambrano, a philosopher and disciple of Ortega, was another prominent woman who had been educated in accordance with the principles of the FEI. Nevertheless, she also received a religious education and at some point during her adolescence reflected on the possibility that she might have a religious vocation. For health reasons, she could not live as a resident at Fortuny and was forced to remain in Segovia, taking her degree as an external student. However, she was a teacher at the Institute-School and gave classes at the Female Student Residence at the end of the 1920s. She was a member of the University Federation of Students, a largely secular association, and was politically active during the Republic, participating in a number of educational initiatives organized for the people. Although she was close to the Communist party at one time, she never belonged to it. Following the Civil War, she left Spain, to return only in 1985. For many years, she had described herself as a committed Catholic (Marset, 2004, 341; Zambrano, 1998, 42-55; Martínez/Pastor/Pascua/Tavera, 2008, 718-721).

The range of texts on offer in the library at the Female Student Residence was limited: what books were to be read had already been decided in advance. The inclusion of the works of St Teresa of Avila is relevant in this regard. According to Eulalia Lapresta, who was responsible for the library between 1922 and 1928, the ascetic and mystical literature of the saint, along with works by other classic Spanish authors such as Tirso, Calderón, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Concepción Arenal, Rosalía de Castro and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, were the most popular among residents (Fernández Urtasun/Ascunce, 2006, 296-297). Irrespective of whether such reading was obligatory or optional, the books cited above are clear examples of Christian literature – or, at least, contain nothing contrary to the basic principles of that religion.

Conclusion

The principle conclusion to be drawn from the documentary evidence discussed thus far may be read from the underlying argument in the article as a whole. The movement to facilitate women's access to higher education was supported by the 'two Spains' because each saw this development as a valuable opportunity to advance its own objectives: the transformation of the nation. However, to convert prime matter into an instrument capable of carrying out that task required taking the human material as it was, including perhaps the particular gift of women for religion, and adapting it to the nature of what was to come. In real terms, the practical means used to drive both initiatives were very similar and, at the same time, markedly different to the equivalent means used in the education of men at that time. Given the existing social climate,

and the attitudes of most women (with a small number of remarkable exceptions), no other approach would have been possible.

Nonetheless, women managed to significantly enhance their participation in public life during the first thirty years of the 20th century – even without open access to the university system. There were a number of notable female figures in social life who had not benefited from any form of higher education. A wide-ranging list of examples might be given: Carmen de Burgos, a distinguished journalist; Margarita Nelken, who held a seat in parliament; Federica Montseny, who was Minister for Health during the Second Republic; renowned writers and poets (Concha Espina, María Lejárrerga de Martínez Sierra, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Concha Méndez and Ernestina de Champourcin); painters, such as María Mallo; educationalists, like Concepción Sainz Otero; and other cultured women, including Zenobia Camprubí, wife of Juan Ramón Jiménez. All these women made outstanding contributions to their society, despite the fact that none of them had ever attended university.

That the proportion of female university students in the United States in 1920 (43%) was not matched in Spain until academic year 1977–1978 should be noted (Salomon, 1985, p. 141). The movement towards further access for women to the university system only really took off during the 1970s; and, as a result, the corresponding social phenomena likewise developed: women's access to professional life, the development of specific careers for women, and the difficulties involved in combining work and family life and the relevant legislation to enable both women and men make that possible. More recent measures in relation to equality might also be mentioned in this regard. However, to ask someone living in the 1930s to understand things as they are today would be – in historical terms – both wholly incongruous and utterly lacking in adequate contextualization.

¹ That is, the work of the German philosopher, Krausse, a relatively minor figure in the idealist tradition; his thought was discovered by Julián Sanz del Río (Spain) during a study period carried out in 1843, the first time cultural trends prevalent in Europe entered Spanish intellectual life.

² President of the Central University of Madrid, a former Catholic priest, and follower of Krausse; he organized a weekly series of lectures on the education of women.

³ Dorotea Barnés was one of the four daughters of Domingo Barnés, who would later be Minister for Education in the Second Republic. All of his daughters attended university. Dorotea was a university student during the 1920s. She was appointed to the Spanish Royal Academy of Physics and Chemistry, at the behest of Dr. Moles and Dr. Gutierrez de Celis. She spent 1929 at Smith College, on an exchange scholarship, with further financial aid from the Council for Further Studies. The following year she was awarded the “Marion Le Roy Burton” scholarship to work in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Yale. The honor was striking in itself, and even more so at that time for a woman. She received her doctorate in 1931, with a thesis on the cysteine. She began work in the Spectroscopy department at the National Institute of Physics and Chemistry in 1931-1932, specifically on Raman, and traveled to Graz to work with the leading European scientist in that field. She published five articles on the topic, and introduced the use of Raman spectroscopy in Spain. In addition to continuing her research during 1933-1934, she was appointed to the chair of Physics and Chemistry at the Instituto Lope de Vega in Madrid. She was forced to give up her work when she married, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, and had to leave Spain with her husband and young daughter. She taught at a high school in France. On returning to Spain, she changed her surnames and made no reference to her academic qualifications and achievements.

⁴ The book is a collection of lectures given by Ortega from 1934 onwards. The text cited here is that edited by the author himself for a series of lectures to be given at the Instituto de Humanidades in 1949-50.

⁵ Victoria Kent Siano was the first female graduate in Law, the first woman to join the official register of lawyers, and the first woman to open a law firm in Madrid. She took her first case in May 1925. Clara Campoamor Rodríguez graduated in December 1924 when she was 36 years old; she joined the official register of lawyers and began to practice as a lawyer at around the same time as Victoria Kent. She was

the second woman to join the Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation (the first was Concepción Peña). She played an active role in public life in the 1920s, working on the management committees of a number of associations for female university students, intellectuals, jurists, etc. She also participated in a number of international conferences for female university students. Another woman worked for Campoamor's law firm, Justina Ruiz Malaxechevarría. Matilde Huici Navaz was the third female graduate in Law in Spain, following Kent and Campoamor. She played an active part in promoting the rights of women, attending many conferences and cultural and political events organized by left-wing groups, including Socialist Women. She also worked in the Preparatory Section at the Institute-School during the 1920s, which may have enabled her to practice as a lawyer (like Kent and Campoamor). She was a member of the Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation, where her achievements and work were recognized with the awarding of the title, Academic-Professor.

⁶ "El aborto me parece inmoral", *El País Semanal*, (23 octubre 1977): 10. An interview with Victoria Kent carried out by Rosa Montero, during one of the former's visits to Spain after Franco's death.

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