



HAL
open science

Religion and nationalism in secular Europe. Lessons from the Basque case

Xabier Itçaina

► **To cite this version:**

Xabier Itçaina. Religion and nationalism in secular Europe. Lessons from the Basque case. Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, 2011, Democracy, Governance and Citizenship: A Comparative Perspective of Conceptual Flow, 59, pp.10-31. 10.11588/heidok.00011659 . halshs-00593992

HAL Id: halshs-00593992

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00593992>

Submitted on 1 Feb 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Religion and nationalism in secular Europe Lessons from the Basque case¹

Xabier Itçaina²

Keywords: nationalism, Catholicism, mediation, Basque Country, secularization.

ABSTRACT:

The secularization of Western European politics and society has created new constraints but also new opportunity structures for religious bodies. This renewed activism of religious actors in the European public spheres needs to be analysed on specific issues. Immigration, ethical debates or education are well-known illustrations, but ethnonational conflicts are also relevant issues. In that respect, the Basque conflict, on the Franco-Spanish borderland, is a good example of the transformations of the Catholic Church's activism in a secularized environment. It is argued that the Church is trying to develop a new register of intervention in the Basque conflict by fostering its role as a mediator. The Church and other actors close to it are particularly active in the making rather than in the process of peace, which would require some basic social agreement on the way to follow. However, the Church's commitment to mediation has not gone smoothly, notably on account of the controversy over its impartiality, independence and absence of decision-making power. Though its expertise in mediation has been widely acknowledged, the Church has also been forced to come to terms with history, as though the burden of memory periodically acted as a nemesis for the religious, political and social actors. Finally, the Catholic Church's contribution to peace-making can only be apprehended through the double perspective of the secularisation of Basque society and the redefinition of the relationships between religion, the public space and democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Western Europe is generally seen as the paradigm of a secularized political community. Meanwhile, the secularization of Western European politics, policies and society has created new constraints but also new opportunity structures for religious bodies. It has provoked an increased political activism from religious

¹ This paper was presented at the "Religion and politics" podium, European doctoral colloquium on "Democracy, governance and citizenship", University of Heidelberg, October 9-11, 2009. I am grateful to Prof. Subatra K. Mitra, Jiva Schottli and Daniel Bach for their kind invitation and to all the participants for their comments and suggestions. This article is an expanded and updated version of Itçaina 2011.

² Xabier Itçaina is Senior Research Fellow at SPIRIT, Science Politique Relations Internationales Territoire, Sciences Po Bordeaux, University of Bordeaux, France. The author can be contacted at: x.itcaina@sciencespobordeaux.fr

actors, more as lobbies and voices than as moral authorities, and in return a re-mobilization of political institutions on religious issues. Far from being entirely confined to the private sphere, religion still plays a renewed significant role in the European public sphere, not only as an “identity resource”, an “ethical reference” and a “ritual provider” (Voyé, 2006), but also as a relevant institutional player in various policy networks and political settings. This renewal can only be understood if national dynamics and processes of European integration are considered together. However, the emergent supranational level has a growing autonomous logic and influence but remains firmly secondary to national powers and is determined by the same societal trends. The nation-state remains the relevant level at which major controversies about the public regulation of religions are being held and framed. The revival of denominational powers within national arenas – see, for instance, in Southern Europe (Díaz-Salazar, 2006; Garelli, 2006) – testifies two complementary dynamics: a very slow convergence of national models of public regulation of religions, and a still prevalent role of the inherited socio-historical patterns of relations between Churches, States and party systems. Religious representative bodies do generally admit democracy and pluralism as a legitimate way of governing in a secularized political sphere. At the same time, these religious actors refuse the total privatization of religion: they still aim at influencing the political debate. This renewed activism of religious actors in the European public spheres needs to be analysed in terms of specific issues. Immigration, ethical debates or education are well-known illustrations, but ethnonational conflicts are also significant case-studies. In that respect, the Basque conflict, on the Franco-Spanish borderland, is a good example of the transformations of the Church’s activism in a secularized political and societal environment.

I argue in this article that the Church is trying to develop a new register of intervention in the so-called “Basque conflict” by fostering its role as a mediator. By doing so, the aim is also to illustrate, from the example of the Basque conflict, one of the recent studies on changes in peaceful regulation as developed by Jacques Faget (Faget 2008). Faget points to the emergence of new actors in mediation and peace-building in violent political conflicts and argues that mediation is now making up for the shortcomings of the international order, as states and traditional national or international diplomacy have proved unable to address the issue of conflict resolution. These initiatives do not really break away from, but rather complement, traditional state action, as evidenced by the para-state status of some NGOs. Through a strategy of de-politicisation, the objective of these new actors is to facilitate the regulation of conflicts by eclipsing the very intervention of the states. However, the multiplicity of such initiatives from below, initiated by peace-makers with heterogeneous legal statuses and fostered by beliefs and interests which are not only political, may eventually lead to defining new roles for peace-makers thus blurring the frontiers between state and non-state actors (Faget 2008, p. 310). In Faget’s view, mediation is different from global peace-making processes, state or supra-state UN-style diplomacy, etc., in so far as it is:

“a consensual process of conflict management, in which a third party who is impartial, independent and without any decision-making capacity, tries to solve or to moderate conflicts through the organisation of exchanges between persons and institutions.” (Faget 2008, p. 312).

Faget applies his approach to mediation in his study of violent political conflicts, i.e. “political conflicts in which protagonists – states, social protest movements and political parties – do not respect the rules of the democratic game and resort to armed struggle and illegitimate physical violence, for instance.” (Faget 2008, p. 313). While we may question the true mediating dimension of the various

solutions tentatively proposed so far, the violent nature of the Basque conflict, even if deemed of “low intensity”, is beyond any doubt. Since ETA (Euskadi eta askatasuna, Basque Homeland and Freedom) resumed its bombing campaign in December 2006, which led the authorities to adopt a repressive stance as a response, a new cycle of violence has spread all over the Basque country. Quite obviously, the so-called “Basque question” should not be restricted to its most radical manifestations, but the fact is that violence has had major political consequences and contributed to destabilising the democratic game, if we consider the sufferings it has generated and the mediation efforts it has prompted. The persistent use of violence as a political instrument, especially in the light of the peace process in Northern Ireland, makes the Basque country an exception in Western Europe. What it clearly evidences, beyond the tentative explanations focussing on the historical genesis of an old conflict, is the incapacity of institutional and political actors to propose any durable solution.

The question of Basque identity, hinging on antagonistic values, is indeed buttressed on irreconcilable moral positions. As a consequence, today’s Basque society is highly politicised, even on such distinct domains as art, sports or even cooking (MacClancy 2007). Continued violence has prevented this conflict from evolving into a pacified confrontation of values in a stabilised political game, as is the case in Quebec or Catalonia. Since the mid-1980s, the difficulties met by institutional actors who have proved unable to come up with solutions have led organised civil society to take initiatives with a view to solving this enduring conflict, thus breaking the “spiral of silence” (Funes 1998). To take up Bernard Enjolras’ categories, horizontal governance of the conflict by civil society has compensated for the shortcomings of vertical governance by public institutions (Enjolras 2008).

Religious actors play a specific role in mediation in many conflicts (Smock 2006). According to J. Faget, religious actors have long represented the second largest group of political mediators in the world, together with the pacifist and liberal left wing in the United States in the 1970s. In his analysis of the Quakers in the 1970s, the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, and various other Catholic organisations, the best known of which being Sant’Egidio in Africa, Jacques Palard – who adopts a wider definition of mediation – has shown how the Catholic Church could justify its intrinsic capacity to act as a mediator from its own theological foundations, privileging subsidiarity as a way for intermediary bodies to propose solutions to conflicts without systematically resorting to state regulation (Palard 2006). The case of the Basque Country offers a good illustration of this thesis, the Catholic Church and other actors close to it being particularly active in the making rather than in the process of peace – which would require some basic social agreement on the way to follow (§1).

However, the Church’s commitment to mediation in the Basque conflict has not gone smoothly, notably on account of the controversy over its supposed impartiality, independence and absence of decision-making power. Two contrasting perceptions of the Catholic Church have emerged – the Church as an expert in mediation at both local and global levels, and as the guardian of the memory of an old conflict of identity, thus conferring an insider-partial status on it. Promoting peace, reconciliation and pardon has necessarily led to questioning the responsibility of the Church in the historical crystallization of the identity cleavage. Though its expertise in mediation has been widely acknowledged, the Catholic Church in the Basque country has also been forced to come to terms with history, as though the burden of memory periodically acted as a nemesis for the religious, political and social actors

(§2). Finally, and from a more global perspective, the Catholic Church's contribution to peace-making can only be apprehended through the double perspective of the secularisation of Basque society and the redefinition of the relationships between religion, the public space and democracy in the Basque country (§3).

THE CHURCH'S DUAL MEDIATION IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

Although case studies may prove to be too specific, they nevertheless offer the possibility of proposing an in-depth historical perspective. In the case under scrutiny, we uphold the hypothesis of a redefinition of the mediating activities of the Basque Catholic Church in the history of the modes of action adopted by the Basque clergy. From this perspective, contemporary mediation would be the fourth stage of a long process of interaction between religion and the "Basque question" which started in the mid 19th century. Broadly speaking, we may discern four successive periods on both sides of the frontier: a first period marked by tradition during the 19th century (Carlism and political traditionalism), followed by a period of filiation (some members of the clergy were close to the first expressions of Basque nationalism and its Christian-Democratic, personalist development in the early 20th century), and a period of rebellion (secularisation of Basque nationalism and radicalisation of a segment of the Basque clergy in the 1960-1970s). In our view, the reorientation of the activities of a part of the Basque clergy towards peace-making mediation, in addition to its traditional concerns for social action and more specifically religious questions, evidences the emergence of a fourth mode of action – mediation (Itçaina 2007). Though Catholic actors do not hold any monopolistic position, they seem to have incorporated the pacifist third sector which has developed in the Basque country since the mid 1980s. Catholic mediation is multi-faceted, thus placing the Basque Catholic Church in a position somewhere in-between mediation and committed activism. Its action can be analysed from the wider perspective of political mediation (Itçaina 2010), notably drawing on the distinction between the "mediator-broker" and the "mediator-generalist" (Nay & Smith 2002): the general mediator tries to build some common meaning between institutions which may not share the same knowledge and representations – the cognitive dimension of mediation –; while the broker looks for acceptable solutions for opposing groups who may find an advantage in co-operating even though they do not pursue the same objectives and do not have the same interests – the strategic dimension of mediation. The Catholic Church in the Basque country has clearly acted in both ways, more successfully in its activities as a general mediator than as a broker.

General mediation or the making of a culture of peace

In terms of *general mediation*, the Church, in its capacity as an expert in peace-making, has shown its know-how when it comes to staging negotiations and smoothing out differences. In its internal organisation, the Church has put the theme of peace at the top of its agenda, especially in its network of dioceses (Pagola 1995). The best illustration may be found in Guipuzcoa, a province where nationalist radicalism is deeply rooted. Within the diocesan structure – the social Secretariat created when Monsignor Setién became bishop of San Sebastián in 1979³ – top priority was given not only to the nagging problem of unemployment but also to the restoration of peace. From 1992 onwards, the *Gentza* diocesan committee has taken reflective and symbolical action on this issue and staged highly publicised

³ Mgr Setién was first auxiliary bishop in San Sebastián between 1972 and 1979.

demonstrations, as, for instance, the March for Peace to the Arantzazu sanctuary, which gathered nearly 10,000 people, or the Rally for Peace in Armentia (Alava) on 13th January 2001 under the aegis of the four Basque and Navarre bishops. Prelates have urged *ETA* to lay down its arms and politicians to open negotiations. The leadership of the San Sebastián bishops, Monsignor Setién (1979-2000) and Monsignor Uriarte (since 2000), has played an essential role in mobilising local people and neighbouring dioceses, with the support of the bishops of Bilbao, Vitoria and Tudela-Pamplona.

In a more acute way, some groups, notably religious orders, have regarded the reorientation of their activities towards the promotion of peace as an opportunity for them to reactivate their former and time-honoured specialisation. The Jesuits could thus use their long experience in peace studies and peace building, from Loyola to the entire Catholic world. The Franciscans could invoke the theology of their founder, Saint Francis of Assisi, to support their peace-making activities along with their old and firmly grounded commitment to the Basque culture in the Guipuzcoan sanctuary of Arantzazu.

Arantzazu, a highly symbolical place, was first and foremost a Marian sanctuary which traditionally had a symbolical and identity function in the province of Guipuzcoa. It was also a *locus* of memory in commemoration of the Basque cultural resistance against Franco's regime. The year 1956 marked a revival of this symbolical dimension. *Euskaltzaindia*, the Academy of the Basque language, convened in Arantzazu to lay the foundations of a movement for the unification of the Basque language. On that occasion, the Arantzazu seminarians distributed the first issue of *Jakin* ('knowledge') which was soon to become a major journal in philosophy and social science published in the Basque language. The sanctuary, which was rebuilt by contemporary Basque artists under the guidance of J. Oteiza, became the symbol of Basque cultural creativity and emancipatory religious feelings clearly at odds with official Francoist national-Catholicism (Zulaika 1988). The Arantzazu sanctuary thus acquired a specific and highly symbolical dimension in the Basque country. In an attempt to restructure its pastoral project around the question of peace, the pastoral council of Arantzazu – which brought together both priests and laypersons – started to take training and advisory initiatives in 1992, with the help and support of the diocesan authorities. The sanctuary regularly became an arena where representatives of the peace movements and political parties could meet and discuss. Together with symbolical moves such as prayers for each violent death and Marches for Peace, the Franciscan community significantly contributed to the emergence of new *loci* where each party could express their views, in spite of the methodological differences that occasionally cropped up between the Church and the peace movements. Its action rested on the belief that intermediary bodies were presumably more efficient. As expressed by a friar from the Arantzazu community, "we must not leave it only to politicians to find the solution, we must show them the way, hence the importance of pardon"⁴. Through the promotion of peace and pardon, the radicalism of this religious order, which initially originated from an internal and utopian protest against the institutional Church (Séguy 1984), has thus been rejuvenated and updated.

The general dimension of the mediation efforts conducted by Catholic actors is also evidenced externally through their commitment to structuring the peace movements. It was not so much through the avowed implication of the Catholic Church as an institution but rather through the individual activism of Christians that

⁴ Interview with Brother E., Arantzazu, 1998.

their commitment for peace was to express itself visibly. For instance, *Gesto por la paz*, an association for the promotion of peace, was from the start helped and supported by the diocese of Bilbao and by young Christian organisations from Biscaye. However, Christian activism within the peace movements proved to be a very delicate task as they gathered members from various political origins. Jan Mansvelt Beck, for instance, distinguishes six peace activist groups according to their objectives – *Asociación de víctimas contra el terrorismo*, *¡Basta ya!*, *Elkarri*, *Foro de Ermua*, *Gernika Gogoratuz*, *Gesto por la paz* –, founded between 1981 and 1999, and emphasises the differences – and the shortcomings – between their respective initiatives (Masvelt Beck, 2005, p. 214).

María J. Funes (Funes, 1998) highlights the contrasting strategies of the two main organisations, *Gesto por la paz* and *Elkarri*. Indeed the vast majority of *Gesto* members accepted the political regime after the democratic transition, gathering under their name a wide spectrum of political activists, mainly from the *PNV* (Basque Nationalist Party) but also the *PSOE* (Spanish Workers' Socialist Party). From a cognitive perspective, *Elkarri* was closer to the radical nationalist left wing, though it refused violence (Funes 1998, p. 508). Some organisations were mostly concerned with the problem of financial and moral compensation for the victims of *ETA* and excluded the approach adopted by Basque nationalists. Other groups originated in some radical factions within the Basque nationalist left wing. Some were supported by the “constitutionalist” parties whereas others were more firmly rooted in their territory, etc. The Basque Catholic Church thus found itself in a very delicate position among fragmented peace movements, all the more so as most of these pacifist movements expected the Church to adopt a clear stance as if, unconsciously, they still saw the Catholic institution as a reference *par excellence* in its capacity as a mediator.

Christian personalities as mediator-facilitators

It is undoubtedly in the second register of action that the Catholic Church has been able to act as a true mediator, according to J. Faget's approach. If we adopt the conceptual distinction made by A. Smith and O. Nay, the Church has played the role of mediator-broker in the Basque country. Several times since the establishment of the Autonomous Community, members of the Catholic Church have been called, or have proposed, to act as intermediaries between the most radical parties. Their mediation efforts have mainly, but not exclusively, concerned the Spanish government and *ETA*. The Church has also been active in the promotion of dialogue not only between the Basque nationalists and the Spanish political parties and authorities, but also among the Basque nationalists themselves. Though we lack precise data on the Church's mediation activities, on account of the necessary confidentiality of the negotiations, we may still find evidence of the interventions of some high-ranking religious personalities as mediators in secondary sources such as chronicles, testimonies or press articles, which points to the fact that their mediation efforts were anything but anecdotal.

The Church's function as a mediator seems to date back to the transition period. In his memoirs, Carlos Garaikoetxea, the former president of the Basque Autonomous Community (1980-1985) and now a member of the moderate nationalist party *EA (Eusko Alkartasuna, Basque solidarity)* mentions an initiative undertaken by the Society of Jesus in 1984 with a view to initiating new negotiations (Garaikoetxea 2002, pp. 179-180). The Basque Episcopal authorities regularly proposed their help, as, for instance, the bishop of San Sebastián, Monsignor Setién,

in 1986-87⁵, then in November 1997⁶, or the bishop of Bilbao in October 1996. After a failed attempt to resume talks, *ETA* made public the names of four intermediaries who had taken part in the organization of meetings with the Spanish government. Under the Socialist government, it was the former 1980 Nobel peace prize laureate, Argentinian writer Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who assumed this charge. When the conservative Popular Party came to office in 1996, Harry Barnes, a member of the Carter Foundation, took on the role of intermediary⁷.

According to *ETA*, the representatives of the Spanish government were reluctant to accept this type of mediation which could eventually turn the domestic conflict into an international one. The extradition of two *ETA* representatives from Santo Domingo to Spain put an end to negotiations in August 1997. The Roman Catholic community of Sant'Egidio also offered its mediation services. Specialised in conflict management as in Mozambique for example, Sant'Egidio allegedly held secret meetings with *ETA* and the Spanish Minister of the Interior. The rumour of a potential police operation ended these talks. During the *ETA* ceasefire in 1998-99, Monsignor Uriarte, then bishop of Zamora before becoming the bishop of San Sebastián, is also said to have taken part – unsuccessfully – in negotiations between the armed organisation and the Popular Party government⁸. As the fragile success of such mediation efforts essentially depended on the actors' discretion, the official announcement of Monsignor Uriarte's mediation by the Spanish government in October 1999, i.e. a few days before the truce was broken, may have contributed to weakening this mediation process.

Some representatives of the Church did not limit their mediation efforts to bilateral contacts between *ETA* and the Spanish government, but also acted in order to further dialogue between the moderate nationalists and the Spanish executive, as well as between moderate and radical nationalists. This initiative was undertaken by senior members of the Catholic hierarchy. In late September 2000, on the occasion

⁵ "Entrevista realizada por Francisco Mora a Mons. Setién", *Interview*, 569, 9th April, 1987, pp.19-23.

⁶ "La Iglesia vasca está dispuesta a mediar en el conflicto", *Egin*, 2nd November, 1997.

⁷ The Carter Center Conflict Resolution Program started showing interest in the Basque conflict in the early 1990s. In 1994, *Elkarri* and the Basque Studies Program of the University of Nevada in Reno approached the Carter Center to inquire about its possible commitment as a mediator, should there be negotiations between the parties. On 14th November 1995, in San Sebastián, *Elkarri* and the Basque Studies Program signed an agreement creating the *International Committee for the Basque Peace Process*. In 1995, Harry Barnes, a former diplomat and member of the Carter Center, established contacts with Basque political parties, representatives of the Socialist party (*PSOE*) and *ETA*. In 1996, after the victory of the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP) at the Spanish general elections, the foundation tried to inaugurate a new round of contacts, but in December, President Aznar and the minister of the interior, Jaime Mayor Oreja, prevented a meeting between PP members and the Carter Center. In May 2003, members of the Carter foundation had their first contacts with the associations of victims of terrorism (*Fundación de víctimas del terrorismo*, *Fundación Miguel Angel Blanco*, FAES, *Fundación por la Libertad*, *Basta Ya*) and with the department of the Basque government in charge of the victims of terrorism (Fernando Lazaro, "la fundación Carter contactó con las víctimas del terrorismo a finales de Mayo", *El Mundo*, 6th July 2003, n° 4960). Harry Barnes also joined the permanent group of international advisors to the peace process set up by J. J. Ibarretxe, president of the Basque Autonomous Community, in January 2007, together with Joseba Azkarraga (Basque minister for Justice, Employment and Social security), Javier Madrazo (Izquierda Unida), Albert Reynolds (former Irish Taoiseach), Joanna Weschler (Human Rights Watch), Rolf Meyer (South Africa's former defence minister). (*Le Journal du Pays Basque*, 30th-31st January, 2007).

⁸ *Gara*, 1st May, 2000.

of the canonization of María Josefa del Corazón de Jesús Sancho de Guerra, talks were held between the head of the Holy See's diplomacy, Monsignor Tauran, and the President of the Basque government, Juan José Ibarretxe (*PNV*), on the one hand, and the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Jaime Mayor Oreja (Popular Party) on the other. Their main objective was to analyse "the present and future prospects of a peaceful solution [...] together with the potential contribution that the Catholic Church can offer"⁹. For the Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Josep Piqué, this proposed "collaboration" did not mean that the Church was to act as a mediator, as "nobody can serve as a mediator between a democratic State and murderers"¹⁰. Beyond the political controversy, the Vatican acted in its capacity as an expert in peace seeking, which it had already done in other circumstances.

The new political context after the banning of the Basque radical nationalist party *Batasuna* (Unity) in June 2002 in Spain, favoured the emergence of a new form of mediation. Talks took place within the nationalist camp between the moderate *PNV* and *EA* parties, the *ELA* (*Euskal langileen alkartasuna*, Union of Basque Workers) and *LAB* (*Langile abertzaleen batzordeak*, Union of Patriot Workers) trade unions, political, cultural and economic actors and social movements close to the ideas of Basque leftist and radical nationalism, the association of *Udalbiltza* municipalities and some *abertzale* lawyers. These talks were symbolically initiated by religious actors, notably an Irish priest, Alec Reid, who, as a member of the Redemptorist Roman Catholic missionary order, had played a significant part in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland¹¹. The initiative of Alec Reid evidenced the strategy of the Irish Catholic Church which had maintained contacts with the Republican leaders though it had forcefully and openly condemned *IRA*'s military campaign (Rafter 2003). He proposed a "tactical ceasefire" to *ETA* in order to put forward a common proposal for the resumption of negotiations with the Spanish State. He was helped in his task by members of the Bilbao diocese and supported by the Bishop of San Sebastián. Alec Reid had previously taken part in the peace conference organised by *Elkarri* in October 2001 and 2002, as a guest expert, together with a member of the Sant'Egidio community¹².

Under the Socialist party which was elected into power in Spain in March, 2004 the Spanish Parliament officially authorized the talks with *ETA* on 17 May, 2005. A first series of meetings between representatives from *ETA* and the Spanish government occurred at Oslo and Geneva under the auspices of the Henri Dunant Centre¹³. Another series of talks took place between three Basque political parties: *Batasuna* (radical nationalists), the Basque socialist party (*PSE-EE*) and the moderate nationalist party *PNV*. This "political table" rounded its meetings in the Jesuit sanctuary of Loiola, in Guipuzcoa. The religious infrastructure was considered

⁹ [<http://archimadrid.es/princi/menu/notdirec/notdirec/oct2000/03102000.htm>]. 3rd October 2000.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Resumen diario de prensa, Arzobispado de Pamplona, 28th May, 2003. [<http://iglesianavarra.org/hemeroteca/20030528.htm>].

¹² In the last stage of the Conference for Peace, in June-October 2002, *Elkarri* staged another seminar bringing together international experts in conflict resolution, with A. Bartoli, the head of the International Centre of Conflict Resolution, Columbia University, and a member of the Sant'Egidio community, W. D. Weisberg, a member of the Programme for the Resolution of International Conflicts, Harvard, H. Barnes, the former head of the conflict resolution programme in the Carter Centre, and Alec Reid.

¹³ About the complex implication of the Henri Dunant Centre in Geneva, the Carter Center, *Elkarri* and other bodies and individuals before and during *ETA*'s ceasefire in 2006, see (Douglass, 2009) and (Murua, 2010).

by the political parties as a guarantee for the confidential nature of the whole process (Murua, 2010: 67)¹⁴. Parties' representatives were close to an agreement on a draft text redacted on 31 October 2006. This agreement planned to bring closer Navarra and the Basque Autonomous Community in institutional terms, a proposal that would have been submitted to referenda on both territories. Talks eventually collapsed after a series of amendments, but the parties had been very close to an agreement.

The Church resumed its own activism after *ETA*'s announcement of a ceasefire on 22nd March, 2006. On 3rd April, 2006, Mgr Uriarte, the bishop of San Sebastián, presented to the Vatican the efforts made by the Church of the Basque country in favour of peace. Two days later, Pope Benedict XVI exhorted the congregation gathered in Saint Peter's square "to pray in order that everybody will intensify their efforts for the consolidation of the horizons of peace that seem to appear in the Basque country and in Spain, and to overcome the obstacles that could appear"¹⁵. Despite a very cautious attitude – promoting peace is *not* mediating in the conflict –, the intervention of the Pope had a considerable symbolical impact, as it contributed to putting the Basque issue on the Catholic agenda. However, hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict vanished when *ETA* resumed its violent campaign of assassination in December 2006. Leaders of *Batasuna* were arrested, many of the leftist *abertzale* (nationalist) candidates were suppressed from the electoral rolls, *ETA* re-armed itself. The conditions for new talks were not combined any more.

The role of religious mediators is more akin to the position of facilitators than to the position of formulators or manipulators. Jacques Faget (Faget 2008, p. 318) has clearly shown that there was a consensus among specialists on three types of mediation. *Facilitators* act as intermediaries between the warring parties and actually have little control over the negotiation process. Such diplomacy of "good offices" at best contributes to organising logistic support in the negotiation process and facilitating communication. *Formulators* have a more significant role in so far as they exert an important formal control as they choose where, how many and what type of meetings will be staged; they set the agenda, manage the information flow and may propose new solutions to the parties concerned. *Manipulators* can not only make proposals but also use their power of persuasion and their resources, and present conflicting parties with ultimatums. The Catholic Church mediators in the Basque country have mainly played the role of facilitators, furthering dialogue between the various parties. The fact that they have no decision-making power is most probably the reason why their action may be seen as legitimate by the warring factions, much in line with the "power of powerlessness" extolled by the Quakers. "Their power is acceptable precisely because they have no power to constrain actors and do not pursue their own objectives. They just have the possibility of applying one model and influencing the course of the exchanges." (Faget 2008, p. 320).

We should remain cautious at this stage of our analysis. It seems *a priori* that the Church has proved to be more efficient as a general mediator than as a broker, according to the definition of mediation proposed by J. Faget. The scarcity of information available, on account of the very secrete nature of talks and negotiations, makes it impossible to delve further into this question. However, we have to address the question of the impartiality of the Church as a general mediator acting for social

¹⁴ According to (Murua, 2010: 133), the parties also agreed on confiding the final agreement's original version to the Vatican's care, even if the socialists would eventually prefer the Society of Jesus.

¹⁵ Luis R. Aizpeolea, "El Papa apoyó el proceso de paz tras la mediación del obispo Uriarte ante el Vaticano", *El País*, 22nd October, 2006.

peace, and redefine the relationship between religion and politics in the Basque country.

IMPOSSIBLE IMPARTIALITY?

Mediation in context

The Church's activism on the theme of peace has generated open and politically-oriented controversies over the impartiality of the institution on both sides of the borders. The Church of the Basque country – the very expression “the Basque Church” is much debated – has been confronted with a double problem of internal divide over the territorial issue within the Spanish collegial institutions, especially the Episcopal Conference, and within the Basque clergy. In Spain, the internal cleavage within the Church mirrors the various cleavages that have shaped Spain's political life, in some form of political isomorphism: left-right divide and territorial divide.

The Spanish Episcopal Conference, for instance, has not always been in a position to adopt a consensual position on the question of territorial identity and Nation-State, as evidenced by the declaration of Monsignor Uriarte, the Bishop of San Sebastián, who publicly expressed his reservations¹⁶ about the memorandum “On Nation and Nationalism”(OICEE, 2005) published by the Episcopal Conference on 7th January 2005 in which a clear distinction was made between legitimate and illegitimate forms of nationalism, and secessionist positions were condemned. Such a plurality of opinions has also been perceptible among the Basque-Navarre bishops, since the democratic transition. The activism of Guipuzcoan bishops in terms of general mediation has run counter to the more reserved position adopted by the bishops of Navarre over the concept of shared territoriality between the Basque and Navarre provinces. The clergy and the various secular movements have also split over the identity question.

The *abertzale* (‘patriot’) tendency has been most perceptible in three organisations, which are both close to each other yet quite distinct – the Coordination of the Priests of the Basque Country (*Euskal Herriko Apaizen Koordinaketa*, EHAK), founded in 1976 and present on both sides of the border as early as 1977, the Popular Christian Communities (CCPs) and the magazine *Herria 2000 Eliza* (‘people/country 2000 Church’). These movements have been studied in depth by Felix Placer in his PhD thesis in theology (Placer Ugarte 1998) in which he highlights the fact that they have periodically expressed their own positions, sometimes at odds with the official views of the Church, over questions such as the theology of liberation, the status of political prisoners or the nagging problem of the territorial reorganisation of the ecclesiastical provinces of the Basque country and Navarre. The identity-oriented movements within the Basque clergy have been most active in the social forum over the question of peace, creating new debating arenas (Herria 2000; Eliza 2003). In spite of their systematic, open opposition to all forms of violence, their views in favour of a shared Basque identity and territoriality have regularly been the butt of criticism, owing to their alleged partiality towards Basque nationalists.

The action of the Vatican, as the central institution of Roman Catholicism, initially took on a special meaning in this specific context. Different voices

¹⁶ *La Vanguardia*, 23rd January, 2005.

emanating from very distinct sectors of the Basque society appealed to the Vatican – Catholics asking for the official recognition of a Basque ecclesiastical province, or, conversely, victims of terrorism asking for a clearer condemnation of violence *and* of Basque nationalism, pacifists, etc. Periods of ceasefire unilaterally decided by *ETA* were favourable moments for the expression of more global messages from the Vatican in favour of peace in the Basque country. Pope Benedict XVI's exhortation in April 2006 testifies to this trend. The fact that he should have made an explicit reference to the Basque conflict, though in a very cautious manner, contributed to internationalising the Basque question, despite all the efforts developed by some actors who tried to keep it a purely domestic issue. The strong presence of clergymen of Basque origin in the Roman curia and in the missionary orders may also have had some influence on the Holy See's positions on the Basque question. However, we lack solid data to go further in that direction and analyse better the role played by key figures of Basque origin in Rome with strong experience as mediators in other conflicts¹⁷. Nevertheless, it clearly appears that the few implicit or explicit calls for the intervention of the Vatican's diplomacy were undoubtedly tainted by recurrent references to the awkward positions of the Holy See on the Basque cause in recent history, notably during the Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco's regime (Iztueta, 1981). The heavy burden of History visibly pervaded every reference to the Roman institution.

Constraints and resources of the biased mediator

The question is therefore to know whether the Church's impossible neutrality can be seen as an obstacle to its efforts for the promotion of peace. From a comparative approach, the impartiality of the mediator as a necessary condition has been much debated. In his analysis, Jacques Faget has taken up the research work conducted by Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach (Wehr & Lederach 1991) who contend that, although trust in the mediator is a prerequisite, it is not necessarily coupled with impartiality, at least in the societies of Central America that they have studied. On the contrary, they uphold the hypothesis of the existence of an *insider-partial* – and not *outsider-neutral* – mediator whose acceptability and legitimacy rest not as much on his distance or objectivity but rather on his links with the conflict and his relations of trust with the warring parties. However these authors underline the fact that this type of mediation may only occur in specific cultural contexts in which political, economic and social exchanges are still characterised by face-to-face relations and where traditions have not totally been eroded by modernity. A "biased" mediator may thus appear to be more credible in the eyes of the actors, especially if he has some leverage. "In other words, successful mediators need not systematically be impartial, and the game theory model reveals that bias, to a certain extent, notably

¹⁷ Two figures, one from the Spanish Basque country and the other one from the French Basque country, typically represent such expert mediators. Born in San Sebastián, Monsignor Laboa acted as a mediator in many conflicts in Uruguay, Libya and Panama where, in his capacity as an apostolic nuncio, he liaised between General Noriega and the US government. According to *El País* (15th October 2000), he was also active in a case of extradition of some presumed *ETA* members between France, Cuba and Panama in the late 1980s. Monsignor Roger Etchegaray, who was born in the French Basque country, chaired the Pontifical Council Justice and Peace under John Paul II. A close advisor to Benedict XVI, he took part in a number of missions on behalf of the Vatican, notably with Saddam Hussein in 2003 or in Rwanda, etc. (Etchegaray, 2007). According to (Murua, 2010: 68-69), Basque political parties would have contacted Monsignor Etchegaray in order to gain access to the Vatican. In October 2007, various media revealed Monsignor Etchegaray's "indirect mediation" between *ETA* and the French authorities, an allegation that he denied.

through sharing information, is not only acceptable but sometimes necessary” (Faget 2008, p. 319).

Can we thus say that the Catholic Church has been a biased mediator? This is the criticism levelled at the Church by the most radical and polarised parties. For instance, *ETA* has criticised the Rally for Peace organised in April 2001 by the Basque-Navarre bishops in Armentia, accusing the Church of trying to “depoliticize the conflict” in order to go back to the period “before the Lizarra Pact”, while recalling the mediating role of the Church during the 1998-99 ceasefire. Organisations of prisoners’ families (*Senideak* - the families) and the *Gestoras pro-amnistia*, close to the nationalist left, have regularly invited the Church to air its views on the problem of political prisoners, either by staging hunger strikes with the support of some priests, or by directly questioning the Diocesan authorities. On the other side of the political spectrum, the organisations of the victims of terrorism have systematically blamed the Basque Church for its lack of concern for the families of the victims of *ETA*, and its guilty complacency for the most radical nationalists. Controversies have hinged on the problem of the funerals and services in memory of the victims who had met a violent death. Criticism has generally merged into a single but ambiguous message: the Church has been blamed for both its partiality *and* impartiality, deemed politically biased because it was based on some hypothetical equivalence of violence (on the part of the Spanish State and *ETA*).

Acting as a regulator between the various and diverging positions defended within his own diocese, the bishop is undoubtedly the religious personality who is the most exposed to criticism. This is particularly the case of the Bishop of San Sebastián in Guipuzcoa, a province where radical nationalism, though a minority movement, has historically been firmly rooted. In a recent book which updates previous research work on the subject (Setién 1998), José M. Setién (Setién 2007), the Bishop of San Sebastián between 1972 and 2000, reveals how complex the pressure exerted on the Church has been in his diocese. He delves into the controversies over the positions of the Basque Church which rejected both *ETA*’s violence and the purely repressive stance adopted by the State authorities – the bishops’ visits to *all* the prisoners, the rights of the victims, the question of the funerals and commemorative services, the Basque and Spanish bishops’ diverging positions during the 2006 *ETA* ceasefire, the debate over the equivalence of violence. Peace, according to Mgr Setién, cannot be reduced to a mere issue of public order. In his view, there is a close link between the Church’s predominantly religious vision of reconciliation and pardon and its call for the recognition of the fundamentally political dimension of the conflict which cannot be restricted only to the question of violence.

“From this perspective, dialogue, agreements and negotiations must encompass a wider spectrum than the relations with *ETA*. In other words, the solution to the “conflict” and the achievement of peace must be attained, with or without *ETA*, by the political choice of negotiations” (Setién 2007, p. 197)¹⁸.

According to Mgr Setién, the two processes – the end of violence and political normalization – have to be distinguished *and* considered together in order to attain real pacification (Setién 2007, p. 197). Such a stance is clearly at odds with the views of the armed organisation claiming for the recognition of the so-called inalienable rights of the Basque people, and with the positions of those who assimilate all claims for identity with terrorism. In the same vein, Mgr Setién (2007,

¹⁸ This quotation and the following one were translated from Spanish.

p. 202) challenges both the 2002 law on political parties – which banned *Batasuna* as a legitimate party – and *Batasuna*'s persistent refusal to condemn *ETA*'s violence. This ethical approach to the conflict has been perceived by the Basque radical nationalists and by their more radical opponents as abusively liberal – since it reaffirms the legitimacy of *all* ideologies –, or as too overtly committed – because Mgr Setién acknowledges the political nature of the conflict (Bastante Liébana 2006). In his conversation with political specialist Francisco Garmendia (Garmendia & Setién 2006), José M. Setién exposes his pluralist approach to a democratic State, respectful of cultural diversity, a theory which may apply to the pluri-national Spanish State as well as to a hypothetical Basque State. The State and the Nation must be distinguished and the recognition of citizens' rights need not necessarily be linked with any adhesion to “national” feelings.

“From the perspective that he belongs to the political community, according to what we have just defined, any “citizen” who has stable relations with a territorially well-defined Basque State should be regarded as a fully-fledged “Basque citizen”, even though he may not feel he is part of the Basque “Nation”. For that matter, it is only through the mature and respectful acceptance of all the “differences” born out of “freedom” that political *convivencia* (‘living together’) may emerge, the necessary condition so that tolerance, assumed as a fundamental value in a modern and pluralist society, and solidarity, in a society made up of and shaped by national “differences”, may guarantee political and social cohesion” (Setién 2003, p. 135).

Setién's reflections are complex, oscillating between a liberal and pluralist approach to citizenship and the political acknowledgment of national identities. His views were to shape the debate in the Basque public arena in the years 1990-2000¹⁹. The accusations of partiality regularly levelled at him were also the price to pay for his intellectual and ethical commitment. Setién's positions were challenged by those, even among nationalists, who contended that the only conflict in the Basque Country was the radical violence imposed by a group of criminals to the whole society.

More recently, further uncertainty came from the increasing internal discrepancies within the Catholic Church in the Basque Country, notably concerning its alleged conservative turn. Serious concerns were raised among Catholic – and non Catholic – circles around the last appointments of bishops between 2007 and 2009. In Guipuzcoa, 77% of the priests from the province claimed their worry when Monsignor Munilla, perceived as being conservative and reluctant to Basque nationalism, was appointed as bishop of San Sebastian in 2009. In Biscaye, the critical movement *Eliza gara Bizkaia* presented in February 2009 a woman as a candidate for the Spanish Episcopal Conference, in order to denounce the “democratic deficit” of the Church²⁰. Feminists from the *Asamblea de Mujeres de Bizkaia* campaigned in favour of apostasy in order to denounce the Church's position on women²¹. The nomination of the auxiliary bishop in Bilbao in February 2008 also generated controversies.

¹⁹ Mgr Setién's ideas, according to some observers (Bastante Liébana 2006, pp. 113-133), may have some parallel with the sovereignty-association plan promoted by the president of the Basque Autonomous Community Juan José Ibarretxe in 2003-05.

²⁰ Goikoetxea, Agustín « Los católicos vizcaínos reivindican una iglesia ‘más democrática’ con su candidata ‘imposible’ », *Gara*, 24 february 2008.

²¹ Goikoetxea, Agustín « El viraje conservador de la Iglesia católica azuza nuevas campañas en favor de la apostasía en Bizkaia », *Gara*, 16 february, 2008.

These debates found their equivalent in Navarra with the appointment of Mgr Francisco Pérez as archbishop of Pamplona-Tudela in July, 2007. The claims raised by these critical Catholic voices were, for most of them, related to the positions taken by the hierarchies on abortion, bioethics, celibacy for priests or the women's role in the Church. Some voices also raised concerns about the effects of this conservative turn on the traditional role of mediation played by the Church in the ethnonational conflict. It is far too early to make any hypothesis on the effects of this alleged change. It is nevertheless true that these increasing tensions did not contribute to elaborate a climate of mutual trust.

SECULARISATION AND PEACE-BUILDING

We will now tackle the issue of the social and political response to the Church's commitment to peace. Broadly speaking, the involvement of religious actors in mediation activities evidences the redefinition of the relationship between religion and the public sphere in the Basque country from a double perspective – the role of religion in the Basque society and the influence of the multiple conceptions of the Church's mission on the peace movements and on the democratic debate.

Trust in the Church and Secularisation

The involvement of religious actors in the promotion of peace is multi-faceted. By renouncing any monopolistic position on this issue, the Church has found itself sharing the same public space with a multitude of other social and political movements. The Catholic Church may have been seen as one of the main models for political protest against Francoism (Iztueta 1981), but it is no longer the case today. In his PhD thesis on environmental protest in the Spanish Basque country, Mario Zubiaga Garate (2008) underlines that many of today's pacifist movements borrow their line of action – in terms of protest *and* mediation – from the environmental mobilisation movements of the early 1990s, rather than from the Church (Zubiaga Garate 2008). For example, *Elkarri*, founded in January 1995, followed the initiative of the *Lurralde* (territory) collective group, created in 1986, to oppose the planned Irurtzun-Andoain motorway. The stance adopted today by the Church, notably via the *Batetik* Centre, along with other pacifist movements, confers on it the role of a "civil society" actor among others in its mobilisation for the building of a more global movement for peace.

The Church's acknowledgement of plurality is all the more significant as its positions in the Basque society have evolved over the last decades. According to a *Euskobarometro* study published in November 2007 on the degree of trust in the main institutions as expressed by the citizens of the Basque Autonomous Community (Euskobarometro, 2007), the Catholic Church only ranked 11th out of a total of 17, behind the Basque Parliament, the government of the Autonomous Community, the European Union, the unions, *Ertzaintza* (the autonomous police force), the King, managers' organisations, the Spanish government, the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. However, the Church was cited before the Constitutional Court, the political parties, the *Guardia Civil* and the national police force, the Justice department, the armed forces and NATO. Generally speaking, there was an approval rate of 3.7 for the Church on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. Most analysts explain these results by a general feeling of *desconfianza* ('mistrust') for the institutions in the Basque society – only the Basque Parliament and government had scores higher than 5 out of 10. Such results should of course be apprehended with all

the necessary caution as they do not reveal much on the exact state of public opinion on religion. However, they reveal a new trend – the end of the social prevalence of the Church in the Basque society, historically shaped by the structuring role of Catholicism.

This phenomenon is nothing but new. Indeed the secularisation process was already more pronounced in the Basque country than in the rest of Spain by the end of Franco's regime, as though opposition to the dictatorship was necessarily coupled with growing estrangement from a religious institution regarded as the main support of the regime. The *Law on Historical Memory*, voted by the Congress of Deputies on 31st October 2007, had reactivated the debate on the role of the Spanish Church – and the specificities of the Basque clergy – during the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship²², a debate which had conspicuously been silenced during the democratic transition period in the name of national reconciliation²³. However, and despite this new politicization of religion, in the Basque country and Navarre, two provinces with the highest ratio of church-goers and clergymen until the early 1970s, there has been a significant and regular loss of interest for the Church, as regularly confirmed by CIS (*Centro de investigaciones sociológicas*) polls. The Basque country is characterized by the persistence of the secularisation process today, contrary to the rest of Spain where the process has slowed down (Pérez-Agote & Santiago Garcia 2005). The hypothesis developed by A. Pérez-Agote (Pérez-Agote 1986) at the end of Francoism, who argued that the central role of religion had been replaced by politics, is thus confirmed. Nationalism and the linguistic issue have gradually become more important than religion in a now secularised Basque society. The Basque radical nationalists' rejection of the Church has thus contributed to furthering disinterest or even hostility towards religion among the younger generations.

As a consequence, there are now very few seminarians in the Basque dioceses which used to be the main purveyors of young priests, a phenomenon confirmed by data published by *Comisión episcopal de seminarios y universidades* in 2007. The number of seminarians dropped by 30 percent between 1987 (1997 seminarians) and 2007 (1387) in Spain. The trend is even more pronounced in the Basque country. In the diocese of Vitoria, which played such a significant role in the history of the Church, there was only one seminarian in 2007 against 119 in the diocese of Madrid (Bellido 2007)²⁴. We can thus speak of an ever-growing gap between the loss of social influence exerted by the Church as an institution and a high level of politicisation among the religious actors in their public activities. The perception of the major role of the Catholic Church by the political world and the media seems to be increasingly disconnected from the reality of its eroding social influence. However, there is still mutual recognition among institutions. Political parties and institutional actors acknowledge the importance of the Church as a meaningful and legitimate reference in a public sphere lacking stability.

²² The *Ley de la memoria histórica* or *Ley de extensión de derechos a los afectados por la Guerra civil y la dictadura* is a law initiated by J. L. Zapatero's Socialist government for the recognition of the victims of Francoism. This much debated law was approved by the Council of Ministers on 28th July 2006 and by the Congress of Deputies on 31st October 2007. It finds its origin in the creation of an inter-departmental committee in charge of rehabilitating the victims of Francoism (Decree, 10th September 2004).

²³ Sandrine Lefranc has highlighted the ambivalent rhetoric of repentance used by the Churches of Argentina and South Africa after the end of the dictatorial and the apartheid regimes (Lefranc 2002, p. 179).

²⁴ Jacob Bellido, "Creciente caída del número de vocaciones en España", *Camineo.info, Noticias católicas en Internet*, 19th February, 2007.

A Catholic methodology of peace?

The religious dimension of the Catholic institution both brings together and singles out the various initiatives undertaken by the clergy within the multi-faceted world of peace movements. The Church's commitment to the promotion of peace is made in the name of a conception of democracy in which the notion of subsidiarity prevails. More fundamentally, this form of interventionism betrays a critical approach to democracy. The Church rejects a purely *procedural* conception of democracy, according to which political decisions are legitimate first because they are made by a majority. From a critical perspective, the majority rule may be useful for the adoption of temporary compromises, but can hardly initiate any durable solutions to deeply-rooted conflicts such as the ethno-nationalist Basque one. Some mobilisation movements, notably those inspired by Mgr Sétien's reflections, also level criticism at the *constitutional* conceptions of democracy, in which the institutional arrangements of rules and procedures are essential and sufficient conditions for the achievement of political and social stability.

In the Basque country, the institutional order which emerged after the 1978 Constitution of Spain has been unable to address the issue of the recognition of Basque identity in a completely normalized and pacified way. If we follow María J. Funes (Funes 1998), other movements such as *Gesto por la paz* are conversely supported by citizens who adhere to the institutional order based on the Constitution and calling for the end of violence. Through its promotion of a wider social debate hinging on the question of peace, the Church promotes a *deliberative* conception of democracy in which dialogue should precede decision-making. Contrary to the majority system in which the objective is to assess the balance of power without eventually changing the actors' respective viewpoints, the deliberative model makes it possible to solve moral conflicts which, according to Gutmann and Thompson, always imply irreconcilable positions (Gutmann & Thompson 2004)²⁵. In the deliberative process, every single dimension of the problem becomes essential and can be discussed. As identity conflicts are both political *and* ethical cum moral conflicts, purely procedural democratic approaches do not seem to be the best tools to initiate any durable or viable solutions.

The Catholic Church seems to have adopted the same critical approach to procedural democracy in the Basque country as it had already done in other domains, notably on ethical problems. In Spain, the electoral victory of the Socialist party after the Madrid bombings on 11th March 2004 was an opportunity for the Church and some conservative milieus to reactivate their critical positions, especially against the new social reforms on same-sex marriage or education. B. Barreiro (Barreiro 2001) has shown how the various conceptions of democracy – deliberative, constitutional, majority – could be mobilised and opposed on ethical and moral issues such as abortion in Spain and Italy. Politically-committed Christians have to overcome the inherent contradiction of the logic of democratic public deliberation – laws are the expression of the citizens' collective will – and the binding religious law which must prevail over all, whether they adhere to it or not (Hervieu-Léger 1996). There are indeed superior Christian values which cannot be constrained by the majority rule. In the Church's view, the *nature* of the law is often of more importance than its *form*, in accordance with the Catholic conception of common good.

²⁵ These authors define deliberative democracy "as a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives) justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding on all citizens in the present and open to challenge in the future" (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, p. 7).

During the democratic transition in Spain, some values of democratic governance such as tolerance and acceptance of the Other were encouraged by the Church while others were ethically challenged even though they had been institutionalised (Anderson 2003). It is thus from the perspective of the complex positioning of the Catholic Church towards the democratic regime that its pacifist activism in the Basque country must be apprehended.

The deliberative option is at the core of the methodology promoted by the *Baketik* Centre in Arantzazu, the Church's latest initiative for the promotion of peace. According to Philippe Braud, it evidences the Catholics' deep and structural reluctance towards any politicisation of the conflict (Braud 1998, pp. 39-40). Historian L. Mees highlights the fact that the diverging opinions in the political sphere on the nature of the conflict may account for the different positions adopted by the peace movements. Contrary to *Gesto por la paz*, *Elkarri*, for instance, considers that the debate is political, not ethical (Mees 2003, p. 97). The source of violence thus finds its origin in the conflicting opposition between a significant part of the population and the Spanish State on issues such as power-sharing and self-determination. Mees also points out that there is a double risk in the openly political dimension of *Elkarri*'s action, since its efficiency depends on the support of political parties. *Elkarri* is also criticised by all those who object to the intervention of non-elected organisations.

Some Catholic mobilisation movements have tried to smooth out differences with a view to initiating some common and converging positions. This is the case of the pacifist movement in Arantzazu in the years 1999-2000. Its approach to peace was based on the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi and Mgr Sétien's reflections. The *Baketik* Centre has reaffirmed such references since its creation in 2006 under the auspices of the Franciscan community, by giving priority to the promotion of a generalist method of "ethical elaboration of conflicts". 3,500 people, including local representatives and civil servants, took part in the training sessions staged by the Arantzazu centre for peace between 2006 and 2007. We may speak here of an implicit division of work – organisations such as *Elkarri* or *Gesto por la paz* are entrusted with the task of looking for concrete solutions among the most polarised parties in the conflict, while *Baketik* conducts preliminary training work on more global societal problems, without forgetting the religious dimension. In other terms, pacifist organisations are active in the "pre-conciliation" and "conciliation" stages, and *Baketik* is in charge of post-conflict "reconciliation"²⁶.

Through the expression "ethical elaboration" rather than "resolution", *Baketik* insists on the complexity of some conflicts, with no specific solution, which may continue even after the end of violence. *Baketik* proposes to work on three themes: a) reappraisal of the perceptions of the conflict and of the opponent; b) personal links with the conflict (desire for and perceptions of the outcome); c) methodology of empathy. Such an approach, inherited from a long experience of mediation in the Basque conflict (Fernandez 2007), is presented by *Baketik* as an instrument which can be used in other conflicting situations, notably in matters of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. For instance, the "Arantzazu Assisi Proposal", a collection of prayers and quotations which *Baketik* published in six languages in 2008 (Baketik 2008) and sent to all Basque schools, evidences this new global approach, just like

²⁶ Intervention of Jonan Fernández, workshop *La mediación en los conflictos políticos nacionales e internacionales*, 5th June 2008, *Baketik* centre, Arantzazu. The filiation with *Elkarri* has been reinforced by the personal history of the *Baketik* centre leader who was the former leader of *Elkarri* and an environmental and political activist in the early 1990s.

the organisation of solidarity weeks for the African continent. By so doing, *Baketik* intends to reconcile an ethical approach to conflicts globally apprehended and take into account the emergence of new identity problems linked to the transformation of the Basque society, notably because of immigration. At the same time, such an intercultural approach should probably be related to the new context of the professionalisation of mediation, especially in a society with a high social capital and a dense network of community life groups, NGOs and social movements.

CONCLUSION

In the closing lines of the present article, one should remain prudent about the real impact of the Catholic Church's action in matters of mediation. Some reservations about the consequences of the Basque clergy's mediation-facilitation efforts *stricto sensu* may be expressed. However, the Church's activism in order to attract public attention to the urgent necessity of peace cannot be denied. A more detailed analysis should focus on the way Catholic actors intervene in each of the three stages which characterise the construction of political problems, according to Pierre Lascoumes and Patrick Le Galès. The first stage is the transformation of some social facts into public problems, "when the mobilised actors manage to make it emerge in the public space, i.e. when it becomes a cause of public attention, even of controversies, and when positions oppose each other in order to define its contours, scope and causes." (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, p. 69).

In such a process, politicians do not necessarily play an essential role. The Church's contribution to the first stage of the transformation of the peace issue into a public problem has been significant, especially in the Basque country where whole segments of society still refuse to use the expression "peace process" to qualify a conflict perceived as merely pertaining to public order. A public problem then becomes a political one when mobilisation "is strong enough to make it sufficiently visible and challenging for actors who were initially reluctant to take position and debate for or against it." (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 80). The problem "becomes political when the solution envisaged concerns public authorities." (*ibid.*, p. 70). We have seen that part of the Catholic mediation efforts converge on the recognition of the political dimension of the conflict and on the necessity of a social, political and institutional response to it.

However, we have not addressed the question of the Catholic third sector in the third stage of the process. There are indeed three necessary conditions for the incorporation of a problem into the government's agenda: actors must first acknowledge that there is a problem pertaining to general interest and calling for governmental action. The problem must then be presented in terms compatible with the government's domain of competence and in keeping with its ideological positions. Finally there is no systematic call for the actors' intervention and involvement on account of the difficulties of adjusting their respective agendas. In the Basque country, the institutional response to the conflict has taken the form of extremely diverging politically-oriented initiatives: the Ajuria Enea Pact in 1988 (together with the *PP-PSOE* anti-terrorism Pact in 2000 in Spain); President Ibarretxe's project for new statutes in the Basque Autonomous Community (voted by the Basque Parliament in December 2004 but rejected by the Congress of Deputies in Madrid in March 2005); the sovereignist initiatives such as the Lizarra-Garazi Pact in 1998, etc.. Daniele Conversi has highlighted the potential threats at each of the three stages in the process: the persistence of a culture of violence at the local level, the central government's uncompromising positions, and the influence of the

international context and notably the war on terror in the US since 9/11 (Conversi 2006).

In such an environment, the Basque regional Parliament²⁷ voted a resolution on 27th June 2008 in favour of a new referendum supporting the peace process in the Basque country. Presented by President Ibarretxe amid a new campaign of political violence, the text was welcome by the usual chorus of protest and support. The proposed text was invalidated in September, 2008 by the Spanish Constitutional Court, after an appeal lodged by the central government. In such a context, what will the impact on public opinion of the pacifist initiatives be amid such diverging and discordant positions? More specifically, how will the Catholic pacifist third sector manage to reconcile their acknowledged expertise in peaceful mediation and the historical burden of the Church's role in the genesis of the conflict?

²⁷ This was before the March 2009 elections at the Basque parliament, which led to the first non-Basque nationalist autonomous government since Madrid had granted self-government in 1980.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANDERSON, John. 2003. 'Catholicism and democratic consolidation in Spain and Poland' 26(1) *West European Politics* 137 at 156.
- BAKETIK. 2008. *Points de rencontre interculturelle et interreligieuse. Une proposition, 80 prières et des textes pour la paix* (Arantzazu, Baketik).
- BARREIRO, Belen. 2001. *Democracia y conflicto moral : la política del aborto en España e Italia*. Madrid: Istmo.
- BASTANTE LIÉBANA Jesús. 2006. *Setién. Un pastor entre lobos*. Madrid: La esfera de los libros).
- BRAUD, Philippe. 1998. *Etes-vous catholique ?* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- CONVERSI, Daniele. 2006. 'Why do peace processes collapse? The Basque conflict and the three-spoilers perspective' in E. Newman and O. Richmond (ed.), *Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing Spoilers during Conflict Resolution*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 173 at 199.
- DÍAZ-SALAZAR Rafael. 2006. *El factor católico en la política española*. Boadilla del Monte, Madrid: PPC.
- DOUGLASS William. 2009. 'The unknown mediator in the Basque process of 2006', *Argia*, 22 November 2009, n°2207.
<http://www.argia.com/argia-astekaria/2207/william-a-douglass-2/oso?inp>
- ENJOLRAS, Bernard. 2008. 'Deux perspectives théoriques sur la gouvernance' Working paper, groupe de recherche CIRIEC France (Paris, CIRIEC France, unpublished manuscript).
- ETCHEGARAY, Roger. 2007. *J'ai senti battre le coeur du monde: conversations avec Bernard Lecomte*. Paris: Fayard.
- EUSKOBAROMETRO. 2007. *Estudio periódico de la opinión pública vasca*, Leioa, Euskal Herriko unibertsitatea, November.
- FAGET, Jacques. 2008. 'Les métamorphoses du travail de paix. Etat des travaux sur la médiation dans les conflits politiques violents' 58(2) *Revue française de science politique* 309 at 333.
- FERNANDEZ, Jonan. 2007. *Being Human in Conflicts. An Ethical Reflection after Direct Experience of the Basque Conflict* (Arantzazu, Baketik).
- FUNES, Maria J.. 1998. 'Social responses to political violence in the Basque Country: peace movements and their audience' 42(4) *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 493 at 510.
- GARELLI Franco. 2006. *L'Italia cattolica nell'epoca del pluralismo*, Bologna: Il Mulino.

- GARMENDIA, Francisco and SETIÉN José María. 2003. *Pueblo vasco y soberanía. Aproximación histórica y reflexión ética*, Lasarte, Ostoa.
- GUTMANN, Ann and THOMPSON D. 2004. *Why Deliberative Democracy?* Princeton, Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- HERVIEU-LÉGER, Danièle (1996) 'Croire en modernité : au-delà de la problématique des champs religieux et politiques' in MICHEL, Patrick (ed.) *Religion et démocratie* (Paris, Albin Michel) 361 at 381.
- ITÇAINA, Xabier. 2007. *Les virtuoses de l'identité. Religion et politique en Pays Basque*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes.
- ITÇAINA, Xabier. 2010. 'Between mediation and commitment. The Catholic Church and the Basque conflict' in J. Haynes (ed.) *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Challenges to Citizenship, Secularisation and Democracy*, London, New York, Routledge, p. 91-113.
- ITÇAINA, Xabier. 2011. "The power of powerlessness: religious actors' peaceful mediation in the Basque conflict", in J. Faget (dir.), *Mediation in political conflicts. Soft power or counter-culture*, Oxford, Hart Publishing, Oñati series in sociology of law, 2011 (forthcoming)
- IZTUETA, Paulo. 1981. *Sociología del fenómeno contestatorio del clero vasco 1940-1975 (análisis de las causas de la radicalización del clero vasco en el período 1940-1974)* (Bayonne, Elkar).
- LASCOUMES, Patrick and LE GALÈS Patrick. 2007. *Sociologie de l'action publique*. Paris, Armand Colin.
- LEFRANC, Sandrine. 2002. *Politiques du pardon*. Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- MACCLANCY, Jeremy. 2007. *Expressing Identities in the Basque Arena*. Oxford, James Currey.
- MANSVELT BECK, Jan. 2005. *Territory and Terror. Conflicting Nationalism in the Basque Country*. London, New York: Routledge.
- MEES, Ludger. 2003. *Nationalism, Violence and Democracy. The Basque Clash of Identities*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MURUA, Iñaki. 2010. *Loiolako hegiak*, Bayonne, Donostia: Elkar.
- NAY, Olivier and SMITH Andy. 2002. 'Les intermédiaires en politique. Médiation et jeux d'institutions' in O. Nay and A. Smith (ed.), *Le gouvernement du compromis. Courtiers et généralistes dans l'action politique*. Paris: Economica, 1-21.
- OICEE. 2005. "Sobre nación y nacionalismo", *OICEE, nota de prensa, sobre nación y nacionalismo*, Madrid, 7th January.
- PAGOLA, José Antonio. 1995. *Una ética para la paz, los obispos del País Vasco (1968-1992)*. San Sebastian: Idatz.

- PALARD, Jacques. 2006. 'Médiation et institution catholique' 133 *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 9-26.
- PÉREZ-AGOTE, Alfonso. 1986. "The role of religion in the definition of a symbolic conflict: religion and the Basque problem." *Social Compass* 33(4): 419-435.
- PEREZ-AGOTE, Alfonso and SANTIAGO GARCÍA José Antonio. 2005. *La situación de la religión en España a principios del siglo XXI*. Madrid: CIS.
- PLACER UGARTE, Felix. 1998. *Creer en Euskal Herria : la experiencia creyente de las Comunidades Cristianas Populares y de la Coordinadora de Sacerdotes de Euskal Herria, 1976-1996*. Bilbao: Herria 2000 Eliza.
- RAFTER, Kevin. 2003. 'Priests and peace : the role of the Redemptorist order in the Northern Ireland peace process' 28(1) *Etudes irlandaises* 159-176.
- SÉGUY, Jean. 1984. 'Pour une sociologie de l'ordre religieux' 57(1) *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 55-68.
- SETIÉN ALBERRO, José María. 2003. 'Función del estado y de la soberanía en una sociedad plurinacional. Reflexión ética' in GARMENDIA Francisco and SETIÉN José María *Pueblo vasco y soberanía. Aproximación histórica y reflexión ética*. Lasarte: Ostoa, 65-195.
- SETIÉN ALBERRO, José María. 1998. *Obras completas. 1. Dios, política, paz* (San Sebastian, Idatz.
- SETIÉN ALBERRO, José María. 2007. *Un obispo vasco ante ETA*. Barcelona: Crítica.
- SMOCK, David R. (ed.). 2006. *Religious contributions to peacemaking. When religion brings peace, not war*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.
- WEHR, Paul and LEDERACH John-Paul. 1991 'Mediating conflict in Central America' 28(1) *Journal of Peace Research* 85 at 98.
- ZUBIAGA GARATE, Mario. 2008. *Boteretik eraginera: mekanismoak eta prozesuak Leitzarango eta Urbina/Maltzagako liskarretan* Ph D, Dpto. de ciencias políticas y de la administración. Leioa: Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea.
- ZULAIKA, Joseba. 1988. *Basque Violence. Metaphor and Sacrament*. Reno: University of Nevada Press.