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# Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain

Theoretical Debates and  
Cultural Practice

EDITED BY

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**Good Girls go to Heaven:  
The Venerable Mari Carmen González-  
Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia (1930–1939)**

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JESSAMY HARVEY

A SMALL devotional card distributed by a convent of the Discalced Carmelite Order in Aravaca, Madrid, features the portrait of a solemn little girl, around 4 years old, under the phrase: ‘El mejor adorno en una niña es la virtud’ [The greatest embellishment in a little girl is virtue]. Printed on the reverse of this card is a prayer of intercession for divine graces or favours to be channelled through the Venerable Mari Carmen González-Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia (1930–9), a Spanish child whose heroic virtues were approved in Rome in 1995, and who was declared Venerable<sup>1</sup> by Pope John Paul II the following year. The devotional card attempts to resemble in appearance an illuminated manuscript; the initial letter of the prescriptive phrase is an ornate calligraphic design of multicoloured leaves on a vellum-tinted background. This collaboration between words and image serves an eternalizing function bridging religion, history, and femininity, and because the card is an example of what David Morgan (1998) calls ‘visual piety’—the process of social construction that is encoded in the visual culture of religion—it is a primary document in understanding the construction of a particular identity: the good Catholic girl. A devotional card is part of the

<sup>1</sup> At present, the first stage of the canonization process is to award the title of Venerable, should the person under consideration merit this in the eyes of the Church. This means that she or he is now officially worthy of private veneration. All the documentation prepared and reviewed up till this point, which is considerable, is ‘in view of the Church, the product of rigorous human investigation and judgement, but fallible nonetheless’ (Woodward 1991: 84). What is required to merit beatification and, thereafter, canonization is signs of God: miracles. In Mari Carmen’s case, data are still being gathered to substantiate claims that the requisite miracles have taken place.

liturgy of daily life for a believer. Morgan notes that ‘the believer prays to a saint with whom he or she feels a special affinity, related perhaps to age, gender, profession, nation, ethnicity, namesake, family history, or particular circumstance’ (1998: 70). Therefore this card, as any other devotional card, can be understood not only as a way and means to reach God, but as an expression of identity—both of the believer, who ‘subscribes’ to a saint of his or her choice, and of the saint (or aspiring saint, such as a Venerable or a Blessed) who is fashioned by the promoters of his or her cause.

This essay will analyse the material culture—visual and textual—promoting Mari Carmen as an exemplary figure for Catholic girls in order to shed light on the ways in which she has been represented, how her exemplary status has been established and sustained, the manner in which her life and personality has been imaginatively reconstructed, and to what purpose. Geoffrey Cubitt defines an exemplary life as one that is ‘valued and admired not merely (or even necessarily) for its practical achievements, but for the moral or ethical or social truths or values which it is perceived both to embody and, through force of example, to impress on the minds of others’ (Cubitt and Warren 2000: 2). As a mere child, whose short life yields very little in terms of practical achievement but presents many anecdotes that attest to her virtue, Mari Carmen is a particularly interesting exemplar, fulfilling’s Cubitt’s definition of a person whose existence ‘is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance—that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective investment’ (Cubitt and Warren 2000: 3). Sainthood is an eminently social phenomenon: saints are made, not born. Holy people in all times, places, and religions are the product of historically specific environments in which certain models of behaviour, out of a much larger repertoire available in their cultural tradition, are recommended for imitation. As Pierre Delooz observes: ‘for nearly 2000 years, a social group, the Roman Catholic Church, has been recognizing certain persons as saints. The study of these persons is likely to teach us something about the group which selected them’ (Delooz 1983: 189). So two questions are raised at this juncture. First of all, which social group selected Mari Carmen González-Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia as an exemplary model? And secondly, what is the model of behaviour that is being recommended for imitation?

#### GROUP CHARISMA

Mari Carmen was born into a noble and militant Catholic family: a family background which harks back to a medieval model of sainthood when ‘the vast majority of the saints came from the wealthy noble and urban elite which governed Europe’ (Goodich 1973: 286), reflecting ‘the church’s desire to reward a faithful clan rather than an outstanding individual’ (Goodich 1973: 289). The willingness of the González-Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia clan, and the willingness of those around them, to view each member of their family as special and due public recognition is linked to the historical context: the Spanish Civil War, the triumph of the Nationalists, and the subsequent National-Catholic social order. The family were members of a social group which felt that it could claim superior grace and superior virtues as an eternal gift, by contrast with those groups defeated in the Civil War whom they, for that reason, felt entitled to condemn. They had what Norbert Elias calls, after Max Weber, ‘group charisma’; whereas the defeated were culturally understood as having negative attributes or being tainted with ‘group disgrace’. Even the most recent hagiographies and promotional material speak from the perspective of a ‘charisma group’ which feels entitled to condemn those they perceive as ‘others’: specified in the literature about Mari Carmen as ‘rojos’ [reds], ‘judíos’ [Jews], and masons.

Mari Carmen’s grandmother, Carmen de Manzanos y Matheu, Marquesa de Almaguer, had very strong connections with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, partly due to her social position and partly due to her work promoting the cult of the Sacred Heart, for which she spent time and money distributing devotional material from an office in her home (González-Valerio 1997: 52). The political implications of this cult are explored by William A. Christian who notes that the Sacred Heart was a ‘defiant badge of activism for all mobilized Catholics’ (1992: 4) to protest against liberal government policies which, they felt, eroded their moral values and religious beliefs. This political-religious militancy practised by the Marquesa de Almaguer is not the family’s only connection to anti-liberalism, as she was also related, through marriage, to the Primo de Rivera family. The Marquesa’s only daughter, also called Carmen, spent her childhood in the company of José Antonio and Pilar Primo de Rivera, her second cousins who, as is well known, became leaders of Falange Española (the Spanish fascist party) and its Women’s Section (Sección

Femenina) respectively. In fact, when Carmen married Julio González-Valerio, second son to the Marqués de Casa Ferrandel, in 1928, the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera—father of José Antonio and Pilar—witnessed the ceremony.

After a couple of years of marriage, Mari Carmen, their second child, was born—on 14 March 1930. Her baby record book, which gives an account of the girl's first years of life as recorded by her mother, is kept in the archive of the Convent of the Discalced Carmelites at Aravaca (Madrid), which is at the centre of the campaign for her canonization.<sup>2</sup> In having preserved all the telegrams and cards welcoming Mari Carmen into the world, the book functions as a roll call of illustrious names from the European nobility: 'entre tanto personaje se encuentra el nombre del tío de Carmen, el Marqués de Estella, Don Miguel Primo de Rivera, que la felicitó desde París pocos días antes de su mortal "angina de pecho"' [among these many illustrious figures is the name of Carmen's uncle, Don Miguel Primo de Rivera, Marqués de Estella, who sent his congratulations from Paris a few days before his fatal *angina pectoris*] (González-Valerio 1997: 41).

Mari Carmen was born and lived through a historical period marked by socio-economic tension and fierce and violent power struggles between political ideologies and belief systems which would culminate in the Spanish Civil War. Growing up within a family whose world and identity would have felt deeply threatened by the changes wrought by the Second Republic of 1931–6, Mari Carmen's short life was irrevocably altered by the outbreak of the war. Her father Julio González-Valerio was arrested by a militia group, known as 'Milicias del Radio Sur' (González-Valerio 1997: 78), and executed on 29 August 1936. His death, like that of countless other Catholic men and women who, in some way or another, supported values that eventually nourished the ideology of National-Catholicism during the Franco regime, was and continues to be

<sup>2</sup> This archive is closed to researchers who are not members of a religious order. The sources used are, therefore, all hagiographical. However, two of the documents are of interest: Mari Carmen's younger sister María de Lourdes González-Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia's hagiography, *La niña que se entregó* (1997), which functions as both the biography of a family and a spiritual text; and M. Guadalupe Lucía Bertoglio's *Mari Carmen: la fuerza del perdón* (1999), which is the translation of the *Informatio super virtutibus*, a theological document prepared as part of the canonization process.

interpreted as martyrdom, a direct result of religious persecution.<sup>3</sup> Though it is never made clear that the family link to the Primo de Riveras may have been one of the reasons that Julio was executed, this link certainly endangered the family's life during the Civil War. In fact, Pilar Primo de Rivera mentions that Julio's wife Carmen sought refuge in their home at some point prior to the execution (Primo de Rivera 1983: 70–1). After the execution, Carmen and her children were sheltered in the Belgian Embassy, before they could flee to safety in San Sebastián, which had fallen to the Nationalists in October. Mari Carmen was sent, at that point, to a boarding school, Colegio de las Madres Irlandesas RR. De la Bienaventurada Virgen María [School of the Reverend Irish Mothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary], in Zalla. Her school notebooks still survive, and facsimiles of these pages are published in the various hagiographies. It can be read that she, and her contemporaries, wrote down sentences such as 'Dios me vé en todas partes' [God sees me everywhere], 'al cielo van los buenos' [the good go to heaven], and 'modestia que consiste en esa finura noble y digna de una niña verdaderamente cristiana' [modesty which consists in the noble, refined dignity of a truly Christian girl] (González-Valerio 1997: 115–18). These texts show how Mari Carmen's education enforced manners and morals for growing girls. Mari Carmen, it was hoped, would grow up to become 'la futura dama española, continuadora de las virtudes de la familia y encarnación completa y perfecta del tradicional espíritu cristiano en las mujeres de España' [the future Spanish gentlewoman, responsible for continuing the virtues of the family and the total, perfect incarnation of the traditional Christian spirit in the women of Spain] (Sánchez 1960). But, by April 1939, after the end of the Civil War on the 1st of that month, when Mari Carmen and her family could begin to

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation of the deaths of Catholic men and women during the Civil War is shared by the Vatican. On 7 March 1999, Pope John Paul II beatified eight Spanish Civil War martyrs: the diocesan priest Manuel Martín, and Vicente Soler and his six Augustinian companions. On 11 March 2001, John Paul II further beatified the archpriest José Aparicio Sanz and 230 other Spaniards plus two Uruguayans (priests, members of religious orders, members of Catholic Action, and lay people) who were killed during the Civil War. Present among the pilgrims witnessing this ceremony was Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela who actively supports the canonization of Mari Carmen: he has contributed to the Convent's newsletter and written the introduction to Bertoglio's *Mari Carmen: la fuerza del perdón* (1999). The Pope's message 'Capella Papale per la beatificazione di 233 Servi di Dio' concerning the mass beatification can be found (in Castilian only) at the Vatican's website [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) (2001).

contemplate returning to their home in Madrid, she was already terminally ill.

## MARTYR

Mari Carmen lived only just over nine years, dying of scarlet fever in the summer of 1939. It was the severity of the complications that contributed to her death. Scarlet fever is an acute contagious disease prevalent among children that is characterized by a sore throat, nausea, and vomiting; because of the child's high fever, delirium may be present. The name of the illness is related to the changes it works on the body of the patient: a punctate scarlet rash spreads across the surface of the body and, later, a desquamation of the skin occurs in large flakes or casts. The period of incubation is short, around forty-eight hours, but the illness can last for weeks. Mari Carmen, after these initial symptoms, also suffered from otitis media, nephritis, operative mastoiditis, phlebitis, gangrene, and septicaemia. All of these were common complications developing from scarlet fever before the availability of antibiotics. There is no doubt that Mari Carmen suffered great pain and distress in the final weeks of her life. Those around her—her school-friends, the Sisters and staff at her boarding school, members of the medical profession, and her family—will have witnessed her agony and the gradual, but dramatic, corruption of her small body as it appeared to decay long before death. Although countless other children have died in this way, the spectacle of their suffering is often unrecorded, a private affair. However, Mari Carmen's family was well connected; as members of the ruling classes their power networks extended across noble, political, and ecclesiastic spheres. Shortly after her death, it was proposed that Mari Carmen was an exemplary figure: her short life had been marked by holiness and her agonizing death demonstrated heroic virtue. People within this small but powerful network began to suggest that Mari Carmen had been so good—both in everyday life and in the face of death—that she must be a saint. The child's illness and death was, therefore, recast not as a tragedy or loss but as a difficult, painful, but joyful journey of spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, the discovery of a secret diary after her death, in which she had written 'me entregé [sic] en la parroquia del Buen Pastor 6 de Abril 1939' [I offered my life

in the Parish Church of the Good Shepherd on 6 April 1939], a few days before falling ill, gave her death a meaning and a function. The Archbishop of Madrid, Excelentísimo Sr. D. Antonio Ma. Rouco Varela, states that Mari Carmen, in imitation of Christ, offered her life 'por la salvación de los pecadores' [for the salvation of sinners]; these sinners are specifically 'aquellos que asesinaron a su padre en la persecución religiosa durante la Guerra Civil española' [those who murdered her father in the religious persecution during the Spanish Civil War] (Carmelitas Descalzas 1999: 2). It is claimed that Mari Carmen gave her life for the conversion of one sinner in particular, Manuel Azaña y Díaz, Spanish Minister and President of the Second Republic (Verd 1986: 420–34; González-Valerio 1997: 108–10). But also, it is maintained, Mari Carmen offered her life to expiate the death of her father, for her secret diary records the message 'por papá —7-5-1939—Domingo' [for Daddy, Sunday, 7 May 1939] (Sánchez 1960: 50).

Her father's death was interpreted as religious martyrdom by the clergy, but his canonization process failed at an early stage, his daughter taking on the role of expiatory victim more successfully. On her deathbed she is supposed to have exclaimed, '¡Papá murió mártir! Pobre mamá. Y yo muero víctima' [Daddy died a martyr! Poor Mummy! And I die a victim] (Sánchez 1960: 63; González-Valerio 1997: 132). The word 'victim' has to be understood here as having the sense of a theological virtue: 'hay también quienes se ofrecen especialmente como víctimas, a la manera del mismo Jesucristo, y se entregan en holocausto de expiación por los pecados del mundo' [there are also those who offer themselves up specifically as victims, as did Christ, and who give their lives in sacrificial expiation of the sins of the world] (Verd 1986: 93). Mari Carmen's exclamations were witnessed by Doctor Blanco Soler, a renowned paediatrician, also a supporter of the Nationalist cause, who would serve as a witness for the canonization process (González-Valerio 1997: 129).

Mari Carmen died on 17 July 1939. Her funeral, which should have been the following day, was delayed because the streets of Madrid were blocked due to the third anniversary celebrations of the military uprising led by Franco in 1936. A post-war schoolbook, in which the National-Catholic feast days are listed, calls this day the 'día del valor' [day of courage]: 'Fecha gloriosa en que los buenos

españoles, capitaneados por Franco, se alzaron en armas para eliminar las influencias marxistas y extranjerizantes que dominaban la vida nacional y lograr que en España renaciera su ancestral sentimiento católico' [The glorious day when good Spaniards, captained by General Franco, rose up in arms to extirpate the Marxist and foreign influences dominating national life and to secure the rebirth of the nation's ancestral Catholic sentiments] (Dalmau Carles n.d.: 358). Mari Carmen lived between 1930 and 1939: though she was not a casualty of the Civil War, the events of her life are interpreted by those who support her cause for canonization as inextricably connected to this traumatic period. The date of her voluntary self-sacrifice or 'entrega', recorded in her secret diary as 6 April 1939, is so close to the 'día de la Victoria' [Victory Day] on 1 April; just as her death is on the eve of another crucial National-Catholic commemoration. (It can be noted that the word 'entrega' was also used at the time of the 'sacrifice' of the heroic Fascist warrior who gave his life in battle.) The private grief of her immediate family is transformed, through the canonization process, into an act of political and historical consolation. Mari Carmen's death has a meaning and function for the Spanish Catholic Church; to remember her is to remember the Spanish Civil War.

#### MAKING SAINTS

The Catholic Church has a formal, rationalized way of recognizing saints: the canonization process. At present, the first stage of the canonization process is to award, should the person under consideration merit this in the eyes of the Church, the title of Venerable. To reach this point, several activities must already have taken place. A group recognized by the Church—in this case the Discalced Carmelite order based in Aravaca, Madrid—anticipates the formal process by organizing financial and spiritual support on her behalf. Kenneth Woodward describes how at this stage 'a guild is formed, money is collected, reports of divine favors are solicited, a newsletter is circulated, prayer cards are printed, and, not infrequently, a pious biography is published' (Woodward 1991: 79). Today the memory of Mari Carmen is promoted in many authored hagiographies, prayers, and poems as well as via the distribution of her image on religious artefacts such as holy cards, medals, colouring books, car plaques, pill

boxes, silver-plated trays with her childish signature engraved,<sup>4</sup> and, oddly enough, plastic cigarette cases.<sup>5</sup>

The canonization process involves interviews, lengthy appeals, and bureaucratic procedures that require the demonstration of an exemplary moral life and, for sainthood, the proof of posthumous miracles. The process, therefore, demands that the devotion to the figure of Mari Carmen, a child who died of scarlet fever in 1939 aged just over 9 years old, be maintained over decades, beyond a single generation of initial enthusiasts, by a dedicated international institution which has the resources and the desire to keep her memory alive. William A. Christian has noted how these institutions make use of forms of mass communication to stimulate and sustain devotion: 'the history of the industrial propagation of particular saints, critical for the survival of shrines and the growth of the saint's prestige, goes back to the very beginning of mass-produced literature', for 'in the first years of the sixteenth century, religious prints were being sent from Flanders to Spain in the tens of thousands at a time' (Christian 1991: 175) and by the late nineteenth century the publication of regular magazines, or 'mail-order shrines' as Christian quips, had begun to circulate across diocesan and international boundaries.

The magazine dedicated to Mari Carmen, prepared by the Discalced Carmelite order based in Aravaca, Madrid, is published twice a year and is posted to believers in Spain and abroad. Issue number 33, dated May 1999, is printed on glossy paper; a hand-tinted photograph of Mari Carmen taken on the day of her First Communion is inset alongside the title *La niña que se entregó a Dios* in pink cursive lettering. The main body of the text is formed by letters from supporters giving details of 'favours' granted by God via Mari Carmen's intercession. Although some may appear to a non-believer to be quite banal and therefore dismissable, these 'favours' demonstrate the way faith operates in contemporary Catholic culture. Amparo Romero, for example, understands both her husband's positive exam results and her new job 'con un horario adecuado, compatible para el cuidado de mis hijas' [with the right hours allowing me to look after

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Steedman notes that there is a fetishistic aspect to the facsimile publication of a child's handwriting, as 'it allows some adults to believe that they have penetrated the very heart of childhood' (1982: 61).

<sup>5</sup> These and similar objects—what Colleen McDannell has called 'Jesus junk. Holy hardware. Christian kitsch' (1995: 222)—can be acquired for modest prices from Carmelitas Descalzas, Carretera de Húmera s/n, Aravaca, 28023 Madrid.

my daughters] as a direct response to her prayers, and indicates the special position that Mari Carmen holds in her belief system: 'es como si fuera el Ángel de nuestra guarda' [she's like our guardian angel] (Carmelitas Descalzas 1999: 4).

Mari Carmen, thus, has an afterlife that extends beyond the members of her immediate family and contemporaries. The real girl, whoever she may have been, has been thoroughly encased in the straitjacket of conventional hagiography.

#### HAGIOGRAPHIES AS SCRIPTS OF FEMININITY

Hagiographies are powerful and persuasive documents. They communicate much more than the life and death stories of their protagonists; they also incorporate social values in a divine, and therefore unassailable, context. All manner of social directives are couched in holy language. Those hagiographies which focus on the childhood of a saint, or which are specifically about child saints, by their very nature as 'record' of an early life emphasize domestic and private virtues such as familial duty, personal integrity, and social benevolence, through examples of good conduct and Christian virtue. Projected in the multiple hagiographies devoted to Mari Carmen is a role model for Catholic girls to emulate: that of a child who takes to the extreme limits of altruism the virtues of filial love, obedience, and self-discipline. Should Mari Carmen ever be recognized as a saint, her name will be added to the canonical list, one consequence being that a child considered exemplary and promoted as a model by a minority will be invested with sacredness. In the hagiographic texts, Mari Carmen is a model Catholic girl who bears many similarities to the nineteenth-century ideal of the virtuous 'charity girl'. Lynne Vallone, in *Disciplines of Virtue*, describes the ideal of the charitable female thus: 'the paradigmatic white middle-class lady-in-training prescribed in conduct books and brought to life in conduct novels, gives money, goods, and time to the poor' (1995: 10). In similar vein, it is written that Mari Carmen gave away her toys and other gifts: 'Mira, mamá, que este año con la guerra, no se van a atrever a venir los Reyes Magos, y se van a quedar sin regalos aquellas pobrecitas. Todos los míos, mamá, quiero que sean para ellas' [Just think, Mummy, how this year, with the war, the three kings will be afraid to come and all those poor little girls will be left without a present. I want all my

presents to be for them, Mummy] (Sánchez 1960: 40). Another hagiography declares 'la hucha de Mari Carmen era el pequeño tesoro de los pobres' [Mari Carmen's piggy bank was a little treasury for the poor], adding somewhat ludicrously that 'algunos guardan como recuerdo o reliquia aquellas monedas' [some of them have kept those coins as a memento or relic] (González-Valerio 1997: 101).

Mari Carmen did not only practise the virtue of charity but is reported to have been modest, tidy, obedient, helpful, and profoundly religious. In the hagiographies devoted to her, children are admonished to focus on the religious meaning of the everyday, and the merits of sacrifice are illustrated by easily imitable anecdotes, such as Mari Carmen's act of immediately dropping her doll to do her homework, at her mother's request: 'Ahora los deberes? Menudo rollo!, hubierais pensado vosotros. Pero Mari Carmen pensó que podía ofrecer este sacrificio a Jesús' [So now it's time for homework? What a bore, you would probably have thought. But Mari Carmen thought that she could offer that sacrifice to Jesus] (González Sáez de Paylos 1984: 5-6). The absence in the narratives of any traces of great or practical achievements by Mari Carmen could, in fact, be considered a bonus for, as Rosemary Mitchell has noted: 'the truly Good Woman would surely efface herself too fully to leave evidence of her life sufficient to justify a biography' (Cubitt and Warren 2000: 160). This statement is equally valid in relation to the model of the good girl that is presented in Mari Carmen's hagiographies for edification and imitation.

Mari Carmen is perceived as saintly not only because she died well—'Carmencita lo sufría todo en silencio' [little Carmen endured all her sufferings in silence] (Sánchez 1960: 52)—but because she internalized discipline to correct her own faults through the practice of Christian virtues: 'Sus maestras nos hablan de la seriedad de la pequeña para el estudio, de su afán en la práctica de la virtud y, principalmente, de la generosidad de su corazón para con los pobres y menesterosos. Y todo esto no era simple casualidad, sino que respondía a un programa que María del Carmen se trazaba de antemano. Ella aspiraba a ser santa, y para conseguir la santidad era preciso "chincharse"' [Her teachers talk of the little girl's serious dedication to study, her eagerness to do good, and above all her generous heart. These things corresponded to a plan of action that María del Carmen had set herself in advance. Her goal was to be a saint, and to be a saint she had to 'grin and bear it'] (Sánchez 1960, 93). Mari

Carmen may or may not have expressed a desire for sainthood in her life—we will never know, as the real child is lost to us and what remains is a mythical being that stands for many different ideas—but it is possible to discern from the constructions of the Venerable Mari Carmen González-Valerio y Sáenz de Heredia that the standards of goodness and saintliness demanded of Catholic girls during her lifetime were based on a sacrificial economy. Promoted as an exemplary figure, worthy of emulation, Mari Carmen is what every good little Catholic girl should mould herself into, or at least aim to approximate. As Paz García Alajarín (12 years old) writes, cited on the back-jacket of the hagiography for children, *La florecilla de la Virgen* (Aragón 1992): ‘estoy encantada con el libro de *La florecilla de la Virgen*. Lo he leído varias veces y su lectura, además de gustarme mucho, me ayuda a ser mejor e intentar parecerme a Mari Carmen, sobre todo en su amor a la Virgen y en su “entrega total”’ [I love the book of *The Virgin’s Little Flower*. I’ve read it several times and, apart from enjoying it, it helps me to be better and to try to be like Mari Carmen, especially in her love of the Virgin and her total self-sacrifice]. This publication urges the Catholic girl to be well behaved, modest, humble, charitable, and an active participant in church rituals. The book acknowledges that the ultimate sacrifice, death, is not requested of all Catholic children, but declares that ‘los niños obedientes son santos. Esto lo entiendes muy bien porque para ser obediente tienes que vencer la testarudez, el capricho, el orgullo, la pereza. Reprimir la impaciencia... Hay que saber sacrificarse y para eso hay que amar mucho a Jesús’ [obedient children are saintly. That’s easy for you to understand because, to be obedient, you have to overcome stubbornness, capriciousness, pride, and laziness. And suppress impatience... You have to be capable of sacrificing yourself and to do that you have to love Jesus] (Aragón 1992: 50). Lynne Vallone, analysing the complex ideologies manifest in girlhood culture, notes that ‘each girl must decide how to conquer and then channel her girlish nature—characterized by desire, hunger, anger, ignorance, and aggression—into valuable, beautiful womanly conduct’ (Vallone 1995: 5). Hagiographies are an important element of girlhood culture. Edifying books on saints for children have been in circulation in Spain from the 1880s to the present day, enjoying a heyday from the 1930s to the 1960s, though books for young girls are still being published today that portray sainthood as a state to which one should aspire. One of these, *Unas santas a tu edad*:

*selección biográfica de niñas y jóvenes santas* [*Saints at your Age: Selected Biographies of Girl Saints*] (1980), states in the introduction: ‘para que no creáis que eso de ser santas es algo fuera de vuestro alcance, he querido escoger este manojo de flores fresquísimas y fragantes’ [I’ve put together this bouquet of fresh, fragrant flowers so you won’t think that being a girl saint is beyond your reach], and urges the reader to take note as ‘en todos los estados y condiciones de vida hallaréis modelos de santidad que imitar y seguir’ [in all aspects and conditions of life you will find models of saintliness to imitate and follow], adding ‘¡Ojalá que vuestros actos puedan llenar páginas como éstas!’ [Let us hope that your acts will fill pages like these!] (Sanz Burata 1980: 1). These books can be considered ‘scripts of femininity’, because they reaffirm and reiterate cultural narratives that Catholic girls must follow in the process of becoming ‘woman’.

#### SACRIFICIAL ECONOMY

The ‘scripts of femininity’ of any place or period constitute a system of ideas against which women have to measure their behaviour; they thus help us understand the meanings of their compliance or defiance. Models of sainthood, too, serve as behavioural scripts. How, then, might one define the dominant idea of sainthood in Spain in the early part of the twentieth century? William A. Christian, in his study *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*, notes that an ethos of female sacrifice was prevalent in Spain during the 1930s (1996: 96–103). With civil war felt to be inevitable, parishes in the north of Spain were preparing men to accept martyrdom as their fate: that is, death at the hands of other men as a result of religious persecution and in defence of their faith. Christian is attuned to the gendering of sainthood, noting that the complementary programme for women stated that God would take women’s lives directly. They would be victims and stand for the sins of others. In this economy of substitute pain, Catholic women were granted the expiatory role. Christian finds that this ethos pervaded popular religious literature from the period; mystics such as Gemma Galgani and Thérèse of Lisieux became role models, their lives and deaths exalted as examples of passive sacrifice, voluntarily assumed in order to redeem the sins of the world. Certainly, the cult of suffering and sacrifice is embedded in Christianity and the figure of the victim is highly valued.

However, although the ideal of self-sacrifice has been put before men and women alike, it is to women that it has been most rigorously applied. And it is women who have been singled out to expiate the sins of men. This concept of a sacrificial economy, based on the notion of substitution, facilitates an understanding of the ways in which Mari Carmen's death is today being remembered by the Catholic Church. For if Mari Carmen enjoyed the 'privilege' of having her life taken by God directly, it was so that she might play the role of sacrificial lamb to expiate the wartime deaths of men at the hands of other men.

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