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## A Catholic religious press project after the Second Vatican Council; the appeal of *Vida Nueva* magazine for renewal in the Catholic Church

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### ABSTRACT

Beginning in the 1960s, the Church underwent a programme of profound transformation because of the Second Vatican Council. In Spain, this process of renewal was undermined by the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, which began to decline in the last years of the decade. At the same time, the religious magazine *Vida Nueva* initiated a path of innovation that consisted in moving from family publication to a journalism specialised in religious information. This study analyses the contents of the editorials published by *Vida Nueva* from 1968 to 1975, with the aim of exploring how this magazine considered itself, and how it understood the role of general and religious journalism. The results reveal that the weekly defined itself as a Christian, conciliar, critical, and independent publication. Its principal objectives were to analyse in depth religious news, promote a renewal of the Church able to read the signs of the times and renew its mission to serve the world, and commit to social transformation in Spain.

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The promulgation of the constitutions, declarations and decrees of the Second Vatican Council represents a turning point in the history of the Catholic Church (Second Vatican Council 1965).<sup>1</sup> The reception of these texts, whose process of renewal continues to this day in the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church, has consequences not only in the ecclesial sphere, but also in the social, political, and cultural areas (Attridge 2016). In the following years of this conciliar assembly, the dioceses and episcopal conferences are entrusted with the task of interpreting the Council texts to apply them in their specific contexts (Zepeda 2011). This means that the debate on the reform of the Church is brought up for discussion since the 1960s (Congar 1968), but it continues to be explored by researchers today (Lamb and Levering 2017). At that time of radical reform, the religious publications play an important role within the Church, some of which supports the renewal of the Catholic community while others contribute to the preservation of the pre-conciliar time (Barrera 2001).

*Vida Nueva* is one of the religious magazines that supports the Second Vatican Council in Spain the years following the ecumenical assembly. This independent publication, which is owned by the Propaganda Popular Católica publishing group, takes the

Second Vatican Council as its point of reference and attempts to offer coverage of all ecclesiastical information through the different journalistic genres (600 números de VN 1967). José Luis Martín Descalzo is the editor in charge of the magazine at a period that coincides both with the post-conciliar time and the end of the Franco dictatorship (José Luis Martín Descalzo sucede a José María Pérez Lozano en la dirección de *Vida Nueva* 1968). The new editor of this weekly magazine, who worked as a correspondent in Rome for the generalist press during the Second Vatican Council (Martín Descalzo 1963), takes responsibility for dealing with the renewal of the Church in a context marked by the political and social characteristics of late Francoism (Montero 2009).

This study, based on previous research on the editorial line of *Vida Nueva* in the post-conciliar and late Francoism period (Sánchez-Camacho 2018), analyses 360 editorials published between 2 November 1968 and 3 January 1976. The methodology used focuses on the codification of editorials through different research categories, some of which have already been presented with other issues of study.<sup>2</sup> In this study, the categories *Vida Nueva* self-reference and *Media* are reconsidered to examine what this magazine stated about itself in the editorial genre, what its journalistic project was, and how it perceived the role of the media in the framework of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (Sinova 2006).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the article includes the quantitative result of the study and a qualitative analysis of the texts (Wimmer and Dominick 2000).

The main objective of the research is the analysis of the editorials of the magazine in relation to the self-references of *Vida Nueva* and its vision on the media, considering the ecclesial background where the Second Vatican Council is beginning to be interpreted (O'Collins 2014), and the challenging social climate under late Francoism (Tusell 1989). The research questions are: How does the magazine describe itself? How does it identify itself within the religious information publishing spectrum in Spain? How does the weekly understand the role of the media and how does it perceive the generalist press sector in Spain? What importance does the weekly give to the opinion of its readers? How does it assess its past, present, and future? To answer these issues, the paper introduces a context of the religion and media under the Franco dictatorship. With the aim of analysing through its editorial line what the magazine thinks of itself, it is presented the first steps of the weekly in the post-conciliar period under the leadership of José Luis Martín Descalzo, the transformation of the magazine into a publication specialising in religious information, its view on the media and the press scenario in Spain, the analysis of the 1000th edition which is essential for understanding the objectives of this publication, and the farewell of the editor of the magazine at the beginning of democracy in Spain. This analysis underscores the relevance of communication in a public theology that attempts to bring the social and communicative dimension of the faith in a time for Spain marked by a national Catholic dictatorship. At that time, Catholic social thought had already reflected on freedom and right to information, and communication as an important instrument for the pastoral care of the Church (Sánchez-Camacho 2024).

## **The religious and journalistic context in Spain under the late franco dictatorship**

The Spanish Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, is followed by the dictatorship of Francisco Franco Bahamonde, whose Regime is named Francoism (Tusell 1989, 32).

Academic historian Tussell suggests that Spain undergoes different scenarios over more than three decades (1990, 587-793): the influence of fascism (1939-1945), the survival of the Regime in the face of internal and foreign policy (1945-1951), the development of the Regime and the promotion of the policies of Franco (1951-1965), the creation of new economic policies (1965-1968), and the introduction of liberalisation measures in the late Francoism (1968-1975).

In addition to the army and the political party Spanish Phalanx, the Catholic Church is a pillar of the Regime (Tusell, 1990, 568-570). In 1953, the Holy See and Spain signs a Concordat that defines the relationship between the dictatorship and the Church. Domenico Tardini, pro-Secretary of State for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, on behalf of Pius XII, and Alberto Martín Artajo, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Fernando María Castiella y Maíz, Spanish Ambassador to the Holy See, reaches significant commitments. The agreements with the most relevant repercussions for Catholic Church and society are the payment of the Church activities, the funding heritage conservation, the financing of the clergy and religious life, and the appointment of prelates through the so-called right to vote the presentation, whereby Franco ensured control over the designation of bishops (Holy See and Spanish State 1953).

While the Catholic Church represents the moral principles on which the legislation of the Regime is based, there are Catholics who do not support the policies of the Franco government (Callahan 2002, 307). In this respect, before the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in Spain is gradually becoming more pluralistic, so that inside the ecclesial communities, there are different types of Catholics. Firstly, there is a Catholicism of those who identify themselves with the Regime and compare the Marxist ideology with the thought of the new Catholic organisations; secondly, the membership of those who are reformers but still cooperate with the Regime; and finally, Church members who support the trade unions and are critical of the dictatorship (Montero 2009, 91-98).

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Spanish bishops committed themselves to implementing the decisions of this conciliar assembly. The prelates are responsible for embracing the principle of religious freedom, separating themselves from both resistance and excess attitudes to renewal, and establishing the Spanish Episcopal Conference (Ortega 1979, 687-688). In that post-conciliar era, the specialised movements of the Catholic Action are at their climax, because of a strong involvement in the struggle for social justice and the rights workers (Montero 2005, 143). However, this organisation of the laity experiences a severe crisis with the hierarchy of the Church between 1966 and 1968, due to the suspicion of the infiltration of Marxism into these groups (González de Cardedal 2010, 75,132-133).

In a media context, at the beginning of the Franco dictatorship, a Press Law is established. This Law envisions the media as a homogeneous vehicle at the use of political Regime, regulates the penalties for reporting, establishes procedures for the appointment or cessation of media editors, and provides for censorship through the National Press Service (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1938). In the last period of the dictatorship, so-called late Francoism, a new Press Law is developed. Despite the abolition of prior censorship, this Law does not protect freedom of information, including administrative kidnappings and sanctions against the press (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1966a). Nevertheless, publications that are under the authority of the Catholic hierarchy are subjected to a

specific law that acknowledges the right of the Church to make use of the media for its religious purpose (Boletín Oficial del Estado 1966b).

From this legal approach, three types of religious publications can be noted: those from official ecclesial organisations, such as *Ecclesia*, *Signo*, *Boletín de la HOAC*, *Juventud Obrera*, and the diocesan and parish newsletters; those of a generalist interest with Christian orientation such as *Familia Nueva*, *Cuadernos para el diálogo*, *Mundo Cristiano*, *La Familia Cristiana*, and *El Ciervo*; and those founded by institutions, congregations or religious orders, specialised in general and religious information or in theological reflection such as *Razón y Fe*, *Palabra*, *El Mensajero del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*, *Pastoral Misionera*, *Mundo Social*, *Madre y Maestra*, *Ilustración del Clero*, *Iglesia Viva*, *Hechos y Dichos*, *Iglesia-Mundo*, *Serra d'Or* and *Vida Nueva* (Barrera 2001, 122–147). *Ecclesia* and *Vida Nueva* are the two publications that, specifically, attempt to cover the entire spectrum of religious information. However, while the first magazine is an official publication of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, the second one is an independent weekly (Martínez Hernando 1973, 7–8). In this regard, the 1,000th editorial of *Vida Nueva* states that the magazine specialises in religious information since at that time ‘there is no publication in Spain dedicated to this important task ... that followed the news day by day, in all its passion and turmoil’ (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

### The first steps of the magazine *Vida Nueva* and the transition to a new editor

On 1 January 1958, the magazine *Pax* changes its title to *Vida Nueva*. At the birth of this magazine, José María Pérez Lozano proposed that the new publication be made not for Catholic families, but by Catholic families (Watt 2008, 188–191). Gradually, the new magazine introduces technical developments in its format, advertising strategies and periodicity, which from being a fortnightly publication becomes a weekly one (Watt 2008, 231–241).

On December 4, 1965, the magazine updates its design and some aspects of its content: it increases the size of its format, offset printing, and intends to cover more information about the Church in the world, the field of culture, and society. However, the weekly experiences an accelerated decline in the number of subscriptions. In 1960, *Vida Nueva* registered 23,714 subscriptions, but from 1963 onwards the number of magazines delivered began to decrease, reaching a historical crisis in November 1967 with 11,761 magazines distributed (Martínez Hernando 1982, 42–43).

In response to this crisis of readers, at the end of 1967, *Vida Nueva* designs a project that was a novelty for the world of religious information in Spain. In a second editorial on November 25, the weekly announces the end of a period self-defined as a family magazine and marks the beginning of a new phase in which it will produce more professional standards in the world of religious information. The major innovations introduced are better accuracy in the implementation of the different journalistic genres – editorial, news, chronicle, report, and opinion – higher quality in the technical aspects, a new design in the format, improvement in the photographic and infographic processing, and a stronger commitment to the ecclesiastical renewal in post-conciliar times (600 números de VN 1967).

On 2 December 1967, *Vida Nueva* makes the definitive transition to specialisation in religious journalism. In addition, the magazine increases its number of pages, inaugurates a new format and offset to four colours on the cover, renews its sections and journalistic style, gives voice to the readers through its letters, and publishes the editorials (*Esto decimos. La Iglesia, noticia* [This is what we say. The Church, news] 1967). Nearly a year later, on 2 November 1968, the editorial introduces José Luis Martín Descalzo as editor of *Vida Nueva* (José Luis Martín Descalzo sucede a José María Pérez Lozano en la dirección de *Vida Nueva* 1968). At the age of thirty-eight, the priest and writer from Madridejos (Toledo) is in charge of bringing to a successful conclusion the project that began at the end of 1967 (Watt 2008, 267–270). However, Martín Descalzo is not walking alone in this plan; he is supported by an experienced team of writers and collaborators who weekly oversee the religious and social news (*Vida Nueva* 1975).

The first editorial of the period by José Luis Martín Descalzo analyses the history of the magazine, returns to its foundation, and focuses on the future to ensure the continuation of the journalistic enterprise. That editorial outlines a brief profile of the editor, stating ‘the reasons that have weighed on it to take this step’ (‘José Luis Martín Descalzo sucede a José María Pérez Lozano en la dirección de *Vida Nueva*’ 1968). These reasons are due mainly to the extensive curriculum vitae of a young writer who was a reporter for the Second Vatican Council (Martín Descalzo 1963), and warned throughout his previous journalistic career ‘that the Church was an exciting experience’ (José Luis Martín Descalzo sucede a José María Pérez Lozano en la dirección de *Vida Nueva*’ 1968).

The gradual transformation of the magazine towards religious information specialisation produced results of new subscriptions. The editorial of 14 December 1968 celebrates 1,800 new subscriptions. The text highlights the growth of the magazine and the success of the weekly as it moves towards religious specialisation in December 1967. The weekly presents the challenge of to improve the quality of the printing paper and to increase the number of pages. While the magazine is primarily oriented towards ecclesiastical information, that editorial also defines the mission of *Vida Nueva* as the task of ‘placing its Christian vision on what is happening in the world’ (‘Carta abierta a la creciente familia *Vida Nueva*’ 1968). In this regard, the editorial of 24 May 1969 mentions its commitment to the renewal of the Church, calling for change, communion and pluralism (*Hacia una Iglesia fraternal* 1969).<sup>4</sup>

### A new approach to religious media

As previously noted, from 1967 onwards, a new religious journalism was being emerging. The editorial of 4 December 1971 reviews the success of the magazine since it moved towards specialisation in the religious press. The text also celebrates the growth of a media project that, as stated above, from 1968 to the end of 1971 had significantly increased the number of subscriptions, due to the renewal of Catholicism after the Second Vatican Council. This came about as a result of the selection of a new type of bishop, the direction taken by the clergy and religious congregations with a strong programme of renewal. Hence, the journalists of *Vida Nueva* considered themselves an independent journalistic enterprise to promote the renewal that the people of God thought and hoped for (1972: *Más Vida Nueva* 1971).

In the editorial of the issue 1,000, 11/18 October 1975, the publication describes itself as a magazine that pioneered a new journey on religious information. The weekly states that before the Second Vatican Council, there was a religious journalism marked by announcements of 'cults with their lists of novenas and the Sunday evangelical commentaries' (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9). However, after the Second Vatican Council, newspapers began to report 'pieces of truth about the Church, which contributed more to confusion than to understanding of their true mission in the world and the meaning of their actions' (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9). Therefore, *Vida Nueva* realised the need to specialise in religious information, since there was no publication in Spain that reconstructed 'the puzzle of what which was served in a fragmentary way by the daily press' (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

In this new emerging journalism, reader participation was important for the magazine. *Vida Nueva* notices 'a deaf-mute Church' and proposes 'to start the double training in speaking and listening' (Las otras voces de la Iglesia 1970). In its initiative to give more voice to readers, the magazine outlines its commitment to a more participatory and less vertical religious media, considered as 'minor encyclicals of the little people; encyclicals, as we have already said, not infallible, but written enthusiastically under the sign of faith' (Las otras voces de la Iglesia 1970).

The magazine not only promotes reader participation through letters to the editor, but also through surveys. As an example, a survey was launched to get opinions from readers about the magazine with the desire to be able to improve (Ayúdenos a mejorar 1975). In another survey launched, the weekly asks readers for their opinion on the renewal of the Concordat (Holy See and Spanish State 1953), which was a critical issue on the relations between Church and Regime in Spain (Diga usted lo que piensa sobre el Concordato 1971).<sup>5</sup> In a forthcoming editorial, the weekly emphasises the importance of participative journalism, since which understands that it has not only the task of 'helping to form public opinion within the Church, but also the duty, no less important, of reflecting that public opinion' (Cauces a la opinión pública 1971). Therefore, the editorial ensures that the readers of *Vida Nueva* influenced the episcopate by studying the future of the Concordat (Cauces a la opinión pública 1971).

Liberty constitutes another value upheld by *Vida Nueva*. Particularly in the field of the press, the magazine calls for freedom, and defends itself from the criticism of conservative Catholics who accused it of being a publication that is 'critical, destructive, belligerent, rebellious, a killjoy, pseudo-prophetic, horizontal, and idolatrous of the present time' (Testigos de la esperanza 1971). That is why the weekly wonders if these people will allow them to proclaim that they 'are willing to continue to live in the holy freedom of the children of God' (Testigos de la esperanza 1971). The editorial furthermore invites non-enthusiastic readers with freedom of the press to look for other publications with a different view (Testigos de la esperanza 1971).

*Vida Nueva* justifies its critical voice by arguing that if 'a journalist wants to fulfil his role as a witness and prophet in the least, he or her must undertake to be a denouncer'. ('Navidad otra vez' 1971). In this respect, according to the magazine, it is a journalist's duty not to silence events (La difícil reconciliación 1974). In fact, the weekly feels compelled to emphasise its independence in the face of the accusation made in some generalist newspapers such as *Le Monde* or the *El Correo Catalán*, presenting *Vida Nueva* as an 'unofficial body of the Episcopal Conference' at a time when it was presided over by

Cardinal Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, one of the reformist prelates after the Second Vatican Council in Spain (Enrique y Tarancón 1996). The weekly stresses its autonomy, and defines its discrepancies and critical views as a further element of ecclesial fidelity (*¿Son centristas los obispos españoles?* 1974).

### The critical view of *Vida Nueva* on the media in Spain

The weekly refers to the media, above all, to criticise the treatment of news and opinions issued by some newspaper companies. Usually, *Vida Nueva* refers to the generalist or religious press when news concerning the Church are ideologically manipulated or distorted. The magazine projects its own criteria when evaluating the work of the press and revealing how it perceives the communication arena. It defends principles such as honesty, the right to information, and freedom of the press, which had already been endorsed by Second Vatican Council in the Decree *Inter Mirifica* (Second Vatican Council 1965).

Several editorials present what was the media situation in Spain for *Vida Nueva*. Mainly editorials on this subject criticise the generalist press coverage of Church affairs. This is the case with the *Vida Nueva* editorial of 8–15 August 1970, which focuses on a controverted editorial from the newspaper *Pueblo*. That newspaper had accused some priests of inciting the workers to participate violently in a demonstration on the 23rd of July 1970 in Granada, Spain. The editorial of *Vida Nueva* doubts the veracity of the article in that newspaper, which according to the magazine wanted to discredit a demonstration in which the workers would denounce their precarious situation and exclusion (*Leve análisis de un asunto triste y otro divertido* 1970, 6–7). In this regard, the editorial of 9 January 1971 questions the honesty of some of the media in their reporting of the so-called the Burgos Trial (Tusell 1990, 761) and praises the role played by the Church authorities in the petitions for clemency for the prosecution of those six condemned to death. *Vida Nueva* welcomes the backing of the Holy See and the Spanish Episcopate for the pardon. Consequently, refusing both terrorist acts and the condemnation of the death penalty, the magazine rejects the outbreaks of anticlericalism and the ‘systematic campaign of defamation [towards the Church] in some organs of information’ which are supporters of the Regime (*Después de la pesadilla* 1971, 5–8).

The magazine also reflects on the role of the media in public opinion. According to *Vida Nueva*, the media are supposed to encourage people to reflect on social issues. An instance of this is found in the editorial of 2 March 1974, in which the magazine praised *Televisión Española* channel for broadcasting *Becket*, a film that addresses the conflict between Church and State through the life of Thomas Becket (Scully 2000). However, *Vida Nueva* regrets that the programming that night could have been better. The magazine claims that there could have been the rebroadcast of a discussion to reflect on Church and State (Becket 1974, 5).

Regarding the coverage in the religious press, *Vida Nueva* criticises *Iglesia-Mundo* magazine for undermining the project of renewal of the Spanish Church in the post-conciliar period. At that time, the Spanish Episcopal Conference was preparing a document on the Church and the political community, a rather sensitive topic in that period of the Franco dictatorship (Conferencia Episcopal Española 1973). *Vida Nueva* reports that two anti-reformist bishops leaked to *Iglesia-Mundo* the contents of a document that was still being prepared. That is why *Vida Nueva* does not agree with the fact that

*Iglesia-Mundo* launched 'all its missiles against the draft of the episcopal document' before it was published. The editorial, questioning the ethics of those who were behind the discrediting campaign, supports the notion that the Church is sufficiently independent of political power to be involved in the defence of social justice (Cortina de barro en torno al documento de los obispos 1973, 5).

The magazine also analyses the way in which the Social Doctrine of the Church approaches the media. On 22 May 1971, on the celebration of the World Day of Social Communications and the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (Paul VI 1971, 20), *Vida Nueva* analyses the role of the media in society. In its reflection, the magazine is critical of the information sector, even questioning whether it truly promotes the value of freedom (La carta de Pablo VI ... El cristal con que se mira 1971, 5). Thus, in the spirit of the Decree on the Media of Social Communications Inter Mirifica (Second Vatican Council 1965, 9), the editorial suggests 'an examination of conscience about the media for their powerful owners, their receivers, the public authorities, and the Church included' ('La carta de Pablo VI ... El cristal con que se mira 1971, 5).

### **The 1000th edition of *Vida Nueva* editorial: a summary of the magazine's objectives**

The main editorial in issue 1,000, published on 11/18 October 1975, is the most enlightening piece of information about the weekly. The content of the text, signed by José Luis Martín Descalzo, is dedicated to a 'non-existent reader', 'maniac or historian', who in 'the distant year 2500 or 2800' will try to understand what Spanish Christians were like and what they thought in the last twentieth century decades. In fact, thanks to this editorial, paraphrasing its author, it has been possible to infer more precisely what *Vida Nueva* was (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

The magazine apologises for the occasions when its team had not been a messenger of the Gospel, but of 'selfishness', 'anger', and 'unrestrained ambitions'. But this ambition was balanced by a sense of humility, since the editorialist does not recognise *Vida Nueva* as 'a Christian magazine', but as 'a magazine that aspires, that struggles, that would like to be truly Christian'. In fact, the aim of the publication was not to exist 'at the service of itself', but at the service of 'the Church', and to be 'ready to turn around as soon as the Christian sense is capable of new needs or different paths'. Regarding the relationship between the weekly magazine and the Episcopal Conference, the weekly feels 'in full and cordial communion with the hierarchy', even if this collaboration was made freely, 'sometimes with applause, sometimes with silence, sometimes perhaps with a certain criticism'. The magazine is also conscientious of having acted in 'obedience' to the Pope, even though it recognises that 'not all the words of all the Pontiffs' have 'pleased' the magazine in the same way (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

With this aspiration of independence, *Vida Nueva* was registered in the archives of the Ministry of Information and Tourism as a publication on general and religious information. Firstly, this is due to a theological reason, since the weekly understood 'the Church in the world, and for the world'. Moreover, this is because of an argument of a legal nature, since the publication was afraid that someone would understand the Church more narrowly than *Vida Nueva* team. In such a case, they could be accused of going beyond their field by addressing 'trade unions, human rights or wealth distribution'. Finally, it was

registered as a general publication for a third reason, which consisted in respecting ‘fair play’ by wanting to ‘embrace common law’ as another magazine. And thus, as explained in the previous section, the weekly decided to specialise in religious information to ‘put together the puzzle’ of Church news in the daily press (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

The journalistic criterion of objectivity is what *Vida Nueva* seeks to achieve: ‘to be objective, or at least honest, in its reporting of all options’. In reference to the specific Catholic perspective of the magazine, the weekly acknowledges that it is not representative of ‘all of Spanish Catholicism’, but rather of a group of friends, with which *Vida Nueva* agrees ‘on a certain way of seeing the Church and serving it’. It was a group which ‘was conciliar and traditional before the Second Vatican Council and was traditional and conciliar after it’: conciliar, because it believed ‘in the need to renew the Church’; traditional, because it projected a renewal that ‘can only come by a true return to Gospel roots’. Consequently, *Vida Nueva* believes ‘in the need of renewing the Church’, accepting ‘the slow path of all renewal’. Furthermore, that journalist team considers ‘that this renewal can only come about a real return to the roots of the Gospel’, as well as supporting ‘theological research efforts’. *Vida Nueva* assures that it does not endorse ‘the so-called progressive currents’, nor does it worship ‘balance for the sake of balance or the centre as ideal formula’ (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

In terms of its involvement in the social context, the publication expresses its appreciation of Spanish country. Nevertheless, it admits that ‘when truth and nationalist patriotism do not coincide, the magazine hopes to love enough to Spain to cry out: no’. In this sense, ‘*Vida Nueva* is not, and should not be a magazine of opposition to the Regime’, yet ‘neither is it a magazine of the Regime and not even a collaborationist one’. Therefore, the will of the weekly journalists remains ‘to be, as the Church should be, a critic of the society in which it lives’, believing in the ‘needs of minorities’. Despite this, *Vida Nueva* recognises that, due to the laws of the Regime, this critical consciousness is ‘so substantially mutilated’ that it could not be realised as such: ‘That is why we feel sorry for the country which we would serve better with freedom’ (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

In the context of the restrictions imposed on late Francoist Spain, the weekly recognises that it is forced to uphold ‘half-truths’.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, ‘between silence and the possible, *Vida Nueva* opts for the latter’, in the hope of benefit from a ‘future Spain without any violence and with freedom’. In this way, the editorial assures that *Vida Nueva* will keep advancing as far as could: ‘may the readers and the history try to understand us’ (Martín Descalzo 1975, 4–9).

## Conclusion

Through this research it has been examined how *Vida Nueva* described itself and conceived the role of the media in the Catholic Church and in society during the years following the Second Vatican Council. In its editorials, the weekly defines itself as a Christian, conciliar, critical, independent, and specialised publication in religious information. The magazine understood its purpose based on its service to the Church, being in the world and for the world. *Vida Nueva* considers itself a Christian, traditional, and conciliar magazine before the Second Vatican Council. It is Conciliar because of the need for renewal of the Church; and traditional since it aims a gradual renewal to return to the roots of the Gospel.

The weekly is recognised by itself as an innovative magazine within the panorama of religious publications in Spain. Indeed, from the end of 1967, from a magazine of family projection and general news, it is transformed into a journalism specialised in religious information to review the fragmentary content of the daily press on Catholic Church news. In 1968, under the guidance of José Luis Martín Descalzo as the editor, the weekly improves its reputation thanks to the characteristics of its product and the increase in the number of readers.

Furthermore, *Vida Nueva* argues in the principles of objectivity and honesty, without believing itself to be the owner of the full truth. In this regard, the magazine criticises the generalist and religious press that manipulates information, especially ecclesiastical content. The weekly makes an ethical call to some Spanish media, defending veracity, honesty, right and freedom of information, common good, and the integration of the media of the Church into apostolic activities.

Moreover, *Vida Nueva* pays particular attention to the voice of its readers and focuses on a more participatory religious journalism. During the seven years of José Luis Martín Descalzo, the weekly believes the editor had worked at the service of the updating involved in the Second Vatican Council both within the Church and in the social sphere. In this context, *Vida Nueva* played a significant role in the pastoral renewal promoted by the Second Vatican Council. Based on the social dimension of faith, the magazine understood that the new times of the contemporary world required citizen participation in public life. Hence, *Vida Nueva* managed to embrace the theological principles of the Second Vatican Council which, from a pastoral perspective, perceived faith and society as interdependent realities. Far from opposing theology and the world, the magazine contemplated social, cultural and political processes in the light of the Gospel, showing that the mission of the Church should be understood in dialogue with history and at the service of people. The editorial line of the magazine represented a mature reception of the conciliar spirit, in particular of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, by promoting an open Church, committed to the world, attentive to the signs of the times, and convinced that a public and independent voice from the Church could contribute to the construction of a better society (Second Vatican Council 1965).

In the midst of a national-Catholic dictatorship that sought to maintain a close alliance between Church and State, the magazine advocated for an independent Church faithful to the Gospel rather than subordinate to political power. Through its editorials and journalistic practice, *Vida Nueva* developed a pastoral vision that was more proactive than defensive, rooted in evangelical authenticity and dialogue with the contemporary world. In the spirit of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the weekly magazine promoted an open and conciliatory attitude towards modern culture, other Christian denominations and non-believers, embodying the conciliar call for a committed and receptive Church, capable of reading the signs of the times and renewing its mission in the service of the world (Second Vatican Council 1965). At the beginning of 1976, José Luis Martín Descalzo passed the baton to Bernardino M. Hernando, in whom he appreciates a journalist qualified to continue the legacy of the weekly at the beginning of a new ecclesial and social age: the post-conciliar consolidation and the Spanish transition to democracy.

## Notes

1. The four sessions of the Second Vatican Council were not exempt from tensions between a more conservative group, composed mainly of the Roman Curia, and a sector open to the renewal of the Church. On December 8, 1965, the Second Vatican Council concluded, promulgating four constitutions, nine decrees and three declarations, which involved a change mainly in the area of liturgy, in the ecclesiological field in relation to the conception of the Church as the people of God, in the doctrine of the revelation of God, and in the pastoral openness to the recognition of autonomy of earthly affairs in dialogue with the world (Alberigo 1999, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008).
2. Other publications have examined the ecclesial, social and political aspects of the editorial of this magazine in the post-conciliar period (Sánchez-Camacho 2020, 2023).
3. Among the 360 editorials analysed between 2 November 1968 and 3 January 1975, *Vida Nueva* refers to itself on 75 (29.7%) occasions. The reason why the magazine quotes itself is to justify to the reader the position taken on certain issues or to express what the magazine is committed to. Another special topic in the editorials of the magazine is reference to the other *Media*. Quoted a total of 124 occasions (34.4%), the weekly usually refers to this issue to criticize the role of the press in Spain.
4. The turning point of the weekly since 1968 can also be quantified in terms of readers. By the end of the year, it has reached 13,000 permanent readers. The number of subscribers increases in 1969 to 16,000 and in 1970 to 21,000. In 1971, it grows by 500 new readers per month, ending that year with nearly 26,000 subscriptions ('1972: Más Vida Nueva', 1971).
5. The results of the survey were published afterwards revealing that 61% of readers supported the 'abolition of the Concordat'; 31% advocated 'radical reforms'; and 5% aimed at 'a review of details' (Vida Nueva 1971).
6. The idea that the magazine is obliged to support half-truths is repeated by the editor in his farewell. Martín Descalzo departs with the pride of believing that he has not made the magazine 'too bad', at times where he was forced to 'practice the art of speaking half-truths or whole truths with a lubricant'. He asks for apologies from those that hurt or for his 'cowardice or half-measures' and ensures that during those years there were as many hours of pain as happiness ('Año nuevo, director nuevo' 1976, p. 5). Martín Descalzo passes the baton to the 'oldest in the new editorial staff', Bernardino M. Hernando, arguing that other men must take 'control' in the current times. Antonio Pelayo is the journalist who holds the position of chief editor, who will be accompanied by Pedro Miguel Lamet, a future editor of the magazine (Vida Nueva 1976, 3).

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