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FRANCISCA SUÁREZ GONZÁLEZ

El Espiritismo de las mujeres puertorriqueñas:  
De las extraordinarias pioneras a sus herederas  
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2020

## Analysis of "Our Response" by Francisca Suárez

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## ***Our Response to Dr. Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez's Article Entitled "The Religion of the Future" by Francisca Suárez***

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Translated by Henry Hirschfeld

In 1892, Francisca Suárez published *Nuestra réplica al artículo del Dr. Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez titulado "La religión del porvenir"* (*Our Response to Dr. Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez's Article Entitled "The Religion of the Future"*).<sup>1</sup> Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez, who graduated from the University of Barcelona in 1887 as a surgeon, had published an article in the Mayagüez newspaper *El Imparcial* entitled "La religión del porvenir" ("The Religion of the Future"). In this article, Dr. Guzmán Rodríguez stated that superstition, mental disorders, the tropical temperament, and hysteria, were all typical of women and formed the basis of Spiritism.<sup>2</sup> As Suárez explains in *Nuestra réplica*, Guzmán Rodríguez's article stemmed from an invitation made by Mayagüez spiritists in the newspaper *El Estudio* to continue an earlier discussion.<sup>3</sup> *Nuestra réplica* includes three texts: "La religión del porvenir" ("The Religion of the Future") by Guzmán Rodríguez, "Los delirios del Sr. Guzmán" ("Mr. Guzmán's Delusions") by Francisca Suárez, and "Opiniones notables de los hombres más autorizados en todas las ciencias sobre los fenómenos del Espiritismo" ("Notable Opinions of the Most Knowledgeable Men in all Sciences Regarding the Phenomena of Spiritism"), a pamphlet of spiritist propaganda that presents the opinions of fourteen distinguished physicists, astronomers, doctors, mathematicians, and writers from around the world who considered the spiritist doctrine incontestable. As Francisca Suárez explains in the "Warning" ("Advertencia"), which precedes the compilation, the intention of grouping the three texts was "so that our readers know about those who serve in the ranks of Christian rationalism, just as they know about those who after painstaking study

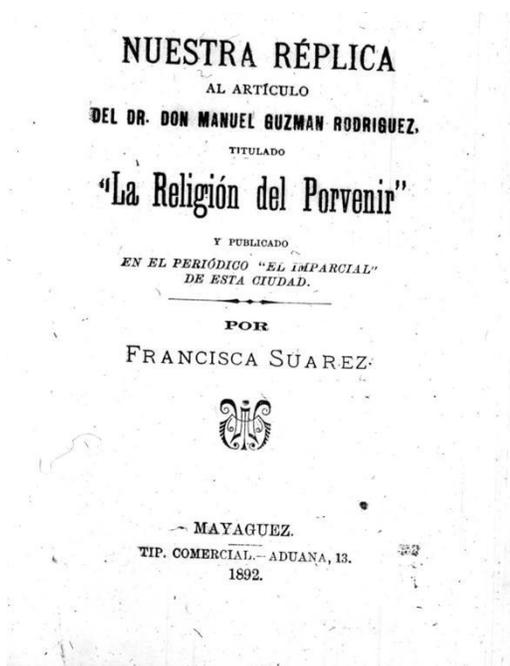


Fig. 1: *Our Response to Dr. Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez's Article Entitled "The Religion of the Future,"* Francisca Suárez, 1892.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Francisca Suárez, *Nuestra réplica al artículo del Dr. Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez titulado 'La Religión del Porvenir' y publicado en el periódico El Imparcial de esta ciudad*, Mayagüez, P.R.: Tipografía Comercial, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico 1860-1907*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2015. p. 287-288.

<sup>3</sup> Suárez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> I am deeply grateful for Dr. Gerardo Hernández Aponte for granting me access and use of this photograph.

have accepted Spiritism as a religion and as a science.”<sup>5</sup> The dialogue that these texts establish is of utmost interest because they portray various controversies regarding Spiritism, which are rooted in strong class, race and gender prejudices, as well as in a certain optimism and sense of liberation that was generated by the freethinking discourses that circulated Puerto Rico during the late nineteenth century. Classism, misogyny, racism and the anxiety produced by the inevitable collapse of the insular Spanish colonial system are all expressed in Rodríguez Guzmán’s text. It contrasts with the ironic but civil tone of Francisca Suárez, who employs solid and informed spiritist doctrine to promote with clarity and ease her spiritist agenda.

### Misogyny and Classism in “The Religion of the Future”

As Kate Manne explains in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, misogyny can serve as a punishment, a deterrent, or a warning, and can include a variety of steps, like insulting an adult by identifying them as a child, an animal, or even an object. In addition to infantilization and denigration, misogynistic hostility can include actions such as ridiculization, humiliation, mockery, masking, vilification, demonization, sexualization (or alternatively desexualization), silencing, shaming, patronization, and other forms of derogatory treatment in specific social contexts.<sup>6</sup> All of these forms of misogynistic violence are found in Guzmán Rodríguez’s article. With a disrespectful and sarcastic tone, the columnist mocks and belittles spiritist women in various ways. First, he ridicules them by characterizing them as follows:

(...) The devotees of this new religion, those pious women who take communion, not with hosts, but with stone mill,<sup>7</sup> those poor sick women deceived by human wickedness and feverish imagination, it is neither indiscretion nor lack of respect for their sex, to confirm that they suffer from nerves and are victims of superstition and deception.<sup>8</sup>

We should note from this passage that Guzmán Rodríguez’s misogyny leads him to transfer the prototype of *la beata católica* (*the Catholic Blessed*) to the new Spiritist Blessed. Trapped within his own prejudice, Guzmán Rodríguez infantilizes and humiliates spiritist women by considering them poor and misled sick people, victims of superstition and deception, and condescendingly condemning them to suffer from hysterics because of their sex.

Masking —another characteristic of misogynistic hostility— shows up repeatedly in Guzmán Rodríguez’s article. For example, he compares spiritist women to Roman witches and ignorant medicinal women, whom he associates with abortion, witchcraft, and superstition. Here is his characterization:

They believe, as an article of faith, that the number thirteen is a bad omen, that Tuesday’s and Friday’s are terrible days, and that the appearance of a comet must

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, NY City: Oxford University Press, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> In Puerto Rico, “comulgar con ruedas de molino,” which literally means “to take communion with stone mill,” is an expression to illustrate the absurdness of a practice.

<sup>8</sup> Suárez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

be followed by some sort of disaster. Like Roman women, they believe in the existence of magic potions, prepared by witches of long dynasties, to inspire love or hate, and on more than one occasion they have procured love powder in pharmacies, made, as they say, from the hooves of great beasts. Some of the blood clots from hemorrhages or abortions take the shape of animals. It is said, in fact, that a spiritist healer has taken a small animal in the shape of a turtle out of the womb of a peasant woman.

Those who dedicate themselves to the practice of midwifery, in order to facilitate the expulsion of the placenta, make the poor woman entrusted to their care drink rum with garlic or urine from the husband, among other nauseating concoctions (...) the faithful supporters of Allan Kardec eat plaster so that their child comes out with white skin, and flour from roasted coffee beans, so that he has black hair without a doubt.<sup>9</sup>

As this passage demonstrates, Guzmán Rodríguez seeks to demonize and diminish spiritist women by using strong rhetoric based on myths, legends, and misogynistic archetypes well known in the West. By associating them with magic potions, witches, hooves from beasts, abortion, animal figures, concoctions, garlic, urine, and plaster, he creates a wild and violent caricature of Puerto Rican spiritists. Where does Guzmán Rodríguez's cruel logic stem from? To contextualize Dr. Guzmán Rodríguez's disproportionate arrogance and misogyny, we must keep in mind that in Puerto Rico, in addition to freethinking Spiritism—which is based on the study of the books by Allan Kardec and his disciples León Denis, Delanne, Camille Flammarion and others—there was also the phenomenon of the so-called “folk Spiritism.” As Néstor Rodríguez Escudero explains, this phrase seeks to describe popular Spiritism, or a type of Spiritism that, although practiced by people who have not thoroughly studied spiritist literature, “have developed healing powers that have been admired by many people.”<sup>10</sup> According to Rodríguez Escudero, in general, each town had one of those healers “that people, spiritists or not, accepted to treat the sick; and many whose doctors had given up on them found a cure when they put themselves in the care of these metagnomes.”<sup>11</sup> Rodríguez Escudero remembers, with respect and admiration, even the names and towns of some of these healers: “the famous good Samaritan woman from San Lorenzo,” “Ms. Juanita from Guaynabo,” “Mr. Cristino González from the Caimital Bajo neighborhood of Aguadilla,” and “Mr. Félix Rodríguez from Cataño.”<sup>12</sup> His use of “Mr.” and “Ms.” shows the respect he had for these individuals who, in his words: “with very little study, and sometimes without any, can do what has cost others great efforts and extensive training.”<sup>13</sup> We should also note that, in some cases, these individuals practiced mediumship and spiritist morality as stated in *El evangelio según el Espiritismo (The Gospel According to Spiritism)* by Allan Kardec, but did not study the scientific observation analysis of spiritist phenomenon or the doctrine as stated in the books of codification, either because they lacked education or because they did not have access to the literature. This type of Spiritism is different

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Néstor Rodríguez Escudero, *Historia del Espiritismo en Puerto Rico*, 2da ed. Quebradillas, P.R.: Imprenta San Rafael, 1991, p. 328.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 328-329.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329. “This is the case of the illiterate old woman who cures the doctor,” notes the writer, journalist, and medium, Nélica González, in one of our conversations (November 20, 2020).

from the so-called tricksters or “espiriteros” because true spiritists, whether educated or uneducated, do not accept any type of compensation for their work. Many of us have witnessed this type of Kardecian Spiritism. I myself have seen, in the center of my grandmother Clara Cardona—a spiritist healer and medium for about forty years—the spiritist morality laid out in *The Gospel According to Spiritism* being studied and practiced, and mediumistic healing works being performed without any sort of payment.<sup>14</sup> As José Arroyo notes, the problem was, and continues to be, that “Spiritism has become identified with popular mediumship.”<sup>15</sup> Arroyo explains:

**The fact that a person is a medium does not make them a spiritist.** The fact that a medium carries out his or her mediumistic faculties in an ethical, honest, and free way, without psychological ties, fetishism, spells, charms or clichés, according to the hypotheses of spiritist philosophy, **that** makes the medium a spiritist medium.<sup>16</sup>

In light of Arroyo’s approach, Guzmán Rodríguez’s suggestion that the Spiritism of his time was related to witchcraft, black magic, deception, female hysteria, and tropical diseases could be understood, but not justified. His misogynistic and defamatory rhetoric that he uses in “La religión del porvenir” is extremely violent and speaks to, above all, his class and gender prejudices.

One of the most despicable of Guzmán Rodríguez’s discursive strategies in “The Religion of the Future” is to attack the messenger, in this case, Francisca Suárez. When he runs out of arguments, the columnist tries to violate Suárez’s dignity by repeatedly referring to her as “a blind woman from Mayagüez.”<sup>17</sup> The repeated use of the epithet “blind” is not only a personal insult but also an act of violence against a woman who suffers from the difficult condition of blindness. For example, referring to one of Suarez’s dictations, he says: “In ‘Historia de un monje’ (‘Story of A Monk’), received by the medium Francisca Suárez, the image of the Spirit is dressed in tasteless clothing. The blind woman uses tiresome language and makes many grammatical errors.”<sup>18</sup> And later: “To the spiritist who knows how to read, of whom there are very few in my town: if you want to be convinced of the blind woman’s tiresome and tasteless style, read page 17 of the book.”<sup>19</sup> By highlighting Suárez’s blindness, Guzmán Rodríguez assaults not only Suarez’s dignity, but also that of the entire blind community.

“The Religion of the Future” demonstrates not only Guzmán Rodríguez’s misogyny but also his classism and racism. Although he is a native of the town of Añasco, he refers to his

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<sup>14</sup> In the present exhibition, the oral histories of Aida Cardona ([https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo\\_aidacardona/](https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_aidacardona/)), Lidia Cardona Fuentes ([https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo\\_lidiacardona/](https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_lidiacardona/)), and Lidia Román ([https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo\\_cardona/](https://digital.kenyon.edu/espiritismo_cardona/)) confirm this. For a brief historical account of how so-called “folk Spiritism” arose on the Island and its relationship with the Catholic Church, the State, and the conservative press at the end of the century, see Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico, Op. Cit.* pp. 193-208.

<sup>15</sup> José Arroyo, *El espiritismo libre de sincretismo religioso. Una guía para saber lo que es y no es el Espiritismo; así como saber lo que son y no son los espiritistas*, 2da ed. 2013, “Prólogo,” p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66 (what is bolded is by the author).

<sup>17</sup> Suárez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

fellow townspeople as “men of scarce intelligence.”<sup>20</sup> And he continues mocking them: “We all know that no one here could invent fireworks, not even the little tailor Quintana, nor Sico Aragonés the shoemaker, nor the public officer and former militiaman Sergeant Cirilo, nor the black cook or the ex-gardener Ramón Giganti.”<sup>21</sup> Here, Guzmán Rodríguez’s misogynistic rhetoric shifts towards the village poor, some of whom have dark skin. It is particularly revealing that, in contrast to the descriptions of his fellow townspeople, Guzmán Rodríguez portrays the men who support his arguments as brilliant; European Catholics who wear suits and have used their power to maintain control over the economic assets derived from the colonies of the Spanish Empire. Among them are: “Father Manterola, the Catholic speaker who has so brilliantly contested the philosophical errors of Spiritism;” “the skilled writer and brilliant director of the asylum in Santa Cruz, Barcelona, whose recent death is mourned by every scientist and author in Catalonia, Mr. Emilio Pi y Molist;” and “Mr. Eugenio Sellés” who, “in his beautiful work: ‘Un alquimista del siglo XIX’ (‘An alchemist from the nineteenth century’), argues that the tropical temperament causes superstition and fantasy.”<sup>22</sup> With the mention of these men, Guzmán Rodríguez enables the racist European Catholic discourse that has justified the exploitation of colonized peoples for centuries. Given this, it is worth asking: what exactly fuels Guzmán Rodríguez’s unusual and violent imagination in “The Religion of the Future?” It is likely that his hyperbolic, misogynistic and classist rhetoric was inspired by a deep anxiety regarding the imminent fall of the Spanish Empire. After all, as historian Gerardo Hernández Aponte has explained, the Island Empire and its Church were in serious decline at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> In her response, “Los delirios del Señor Guzmán,” Francisca Suárez seems to be aware of Guzmán Rodríguez’s anxiety and takes advantage of it in order to promote Spiritism.

### **Irony and Radicalization in “Mr. Guzmán’s Delusions” by Francisca Suárez**

Francisca Suárez approaches Guzmán Rodríguez’s text with an ironic but civil tone. She opens her article describing the mentality of the colonizer, who shoots arrows into the air for fun:

The famous Dr. Guzmán Rodríguez, who shoots arrows into the air for fun, without a doubt, has once again entered into the arena; for he who ignores the arguments of those of us who call ourselves Christian rationalists has nothing else to do.<sup>24</sup>

Her irony continues to highlight the evasive attitude of Guzmán Rodríguez, who refuses to respond to arguments. She emphasizes his foolish and ineloquent tone, which relies on personal attacks because his thesis lacks refined ideas. Hence Suárez’s challenging invitation:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, *La Iglesia Católica ante la invasión de Estados Unidos de América: Lucha, sobrevivencia y estabilización (1898-1921)*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Decanato de Estudios Graduados e Investigación de la Universidad de Puerto, Recinto de Río Piedras, Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2015, pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Suárez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

Write, Mr. Guzmán, write about and challenge Spiritism, if you like; but do not attack people who you know very little about. Review your eloquent publications, which exemplify good judgment, so that we can all request your writing. It is necessary, sir, that when crafting your literary works, you pour great and luminous ideas that satisfy reason into your brilliant concepts, illustrating them with the wisdom that is eager for progress.<sup>25</sup>

Fully aware of her “eager for progress” audience, Suárez sets out to dismantle Guzmán Rodríguez’s text, beginning with the title of his article. She argues that by calling it “The Religion of the Future,” the doctor must not know the etymology of those two words. Being religion the “fundamental basis of morality” and the idea of progress of the soul, both pillars of spiritist doctrine, Suárez appropriates Guzmán Rodríguez’s misused title to expose the bases of Spiritism, which she studies and practices. Hence, she clarifies why the future is so important for spiritists: “You see, Mr. Doctor, the future is a very important matter for us, because it will disarm the tyrants, and take away all of those plagues that in the name of religion deal in holy things and sell what is only the product of their small brains.”<sup>26</sup> For Suárez, the official religion empowers tyrants, it does not comply with the maxims of Christianity, and it takes advantage of what is holy; Spiritism does not. According to Suárez, Spiritism is a revelation from God, created so that the Spirit may evolve and do justice and charity here on Earth. She explains:

We believe that Spiritism is the work of God, not of men. Those who have been exposed to such wise doctrines have the duty to practice them and to share them; because Spiritism, while it is a sweet and life-giving comfort for those who suffer the abuses of tyranny, is also the sublime and magnificent force that disempowers and condemns that same tyranny, pride, and theocracy, the wicked and shameful power of the strong over the weak; it is the great moral revolution that has to cultivate fellowship and love among peoples.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, for Suárez, Spiritism is a philosophy and a radical moral code that challenges tyranny and protects the marginalized; a doctrine that proclaims and sustains Christian morality in its purest sense; as modeled by Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Class and Social Justice**

Francisca Suárez’s spiritist position was decidedly political because the poor were always on her discursive horizon. Therefore, Suárez’s understanding of class and social justice radically differs with Guzmán Rodríguez’s classism. If Guzmán Rodríguez makes fun of the spiritists of his country —calling them ignorant and unintelligent— Suárez stands up for them because, in reality, her own circumstances were precarious. Regarding this, she explains:

On the other hand, I am sure you are aware of how much the poor value the protection of certain entities whose social position allows them to serve the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

marginalized; if those poor people had found that protective hand, there is no doubt that today they would be something else. However, not having an education does not constitute a crime; that is why those whom you judge to be victims of mental disorders will continue to calmly and serenely fulfill their Christian duties, never forgetting who Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles were: is it not true that those poor fishermen also lacked education?<sup>28</sup>

Suárez knew that the poor did not inflict poverty on themselves. She recognized that their poverty was the result of a colonial system that, for centuries, had exploited entire sectors of the Puerto Rican population. She understood that social injustice was immoral and that both the Church and the Spanish State on the Island had maintained social inequalities and poverty for their own benefit. That is why she asked: “How is one going to demand an example of which there has been none? Impossible, dear doctor, impossible.”<sup>29</sup> It is also why, in the face of Guzmán Rodríguez’s description of spiritist medicine, Suárez not only explains and justifies its origin but she relates it to the maxim of Charity: “it is greatly needed for there to be many notable qualities in the art of healing; but do not worry that other beings from the afterlife come to tell us the treatment that we should employ to heal the illnesses among our fellow men, who often lack resources and do not find doctors to cure them at low costs, since many of them do not remember the holy precept of Charity taught by the Martyr of Christianity.”<sup>30</sup> The social inequality of turn-of-the-century Puerto Rico made the healing medium an indispensable resource for the poor, since, as Suárez points out, doctors did not necessarily take care of them. For this reason, within the so-called “folkloric Spiritism,” healing mediums were considered the doctors and even the psychiatrists of the poor.<sup>31</sup> But, beyond her reply to Guzmán Rodríguez, what does *Nuestra réplica* tell us about Suárez’s Spiritism?

### Francisca Suárez’s Spiritism

Francisca Suárez belonged to the first generation of Puerto Rican spiritist women, along with Simplicia Armstrong de Ramú, Agustina Guffain Vda. of Doittau, and Dolores Baldoni, among other prominent advocates of Spiritism. It was, as Nancy Herzig Shannon explains, a group of educated women who were active in spiritist study and experimentation.<sup>32</sup> Like her contemporaries, Suárez belonged to the editorial board of *El Iris de Paz* (*The Iris of Peace*), a periodical managed by Guffain that was published between 1899-1912. She published dictations from the afterlife and articles in magazines and newspapers, and was publicly attacked by defenders of the Catholic Church, who were almost always men, as we saw in the case of Manuel Guzmán Rodríguez. The periodical *El Iris de Paz*, to which she contributed for years, addresses three main themes that allow us to place Francisca Suárez within the spiritist scene of her time: 1) the strong condemnation of Spiritism by the Catholic Church; 2) Spiritism as a

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Mario Núñez Molina “Acercamiento transpersonal: el espiritismo puertorriqueño como terapia”, en *Teoría y práctica de la psicoterapia en Puerto Rico*. Guillermo Bernal y Alfonso Martínez –Taboas, eds. Hato Rey, P. R.: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2005, pp. 91-107.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Herzig Shannon, *El Iris de Paz: El espiritismo y la mujer en Puerto Rico, 1900-1905*, Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 2001, p. 82.

modernizing force in the new century, which promised significant changes; and 3) the key role of women as agents of change at home and in society.<sup>33</sup> As this agenda suggests, Suárez found in Spiritism a progressive and anticlerical doctrine that freed the individual from prejudices and dogmas, as well as a field of knowledge and experimentation that saw the woman as an agent of change. For this reason, Suárez believed that women would play an essential role for humanity during the twentieth century. Consequently, she points out, in *El Iris de Paz*, that the woman, “in the press and in spiritist centers, courageously establishes propaganda with enthusiasm, energy and self-discipline; because her greatest desire is to spread the beneficial doctrine destined to regenerate humanity.”<sup>34</sup>

In the case of *Nuestra réplica*, Suárez refers to Spiritism “as a religion and as a science.” However, for Suárez, “religion” has very little to do with Catholicism. That is why she advocated for a version of Kardecian Spiritism that categorically rejected Catholicism. Regarding this, she said in a debate with *El Ideal Católico (The Catholic Ideal)*:

(...) We spiritists accept the teachings of Kardec as the basis of our doctrine, and, as spiritists, we do not agree with anything that deviates from his philosophy. Thus, we do not believe in attending Midnight Mass, and we do not care what happens there and what you do to increase the amount of masses that your religion has, in order to please the fanaticism of the people and make them believe that the sung mass is more important than the prayed mass... If the religion does not satisfy our beliefs, we cannot endorse it.<sup>35</sup>

As a student of spiritist philosophy, one of her great teachers was Allan Kardec, who in his book *¿Qué es el espiritismo? (What is Spiritism?)* defines Spiritism as “science of observation” and as a “philosophical doctrine.”

Spiritism is both a science of observation and a philosophical doctrine. As a practical science, it consists of the relationships that can be established with the Spirits; as a philosophical doctrine, it understands all of the moral consequences that follow from such relationships.<sup>36</sup>

In the final pages of *Nuestra réplica*, Suárez explains what Spiritism, as a doctrine and as a science, has taught her. She notes its most important principles: belief in God, in love, and in good actions as accessible routes to spiritual evolution; the affirmation of free will and reincarnation, through which the soul evolves and is purified; Spiritism as a philosophy that prepares humanity for the future establishment of universal fellowship, all of which Suárez finds “in the Doctrine of the Martyr of Golgotha,” Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Suárez supplements these principles with the opinions of leading scientists and writers from around the world who have become convinced of the value of Spiritism, making *Nuestra réplica* an engine for promoting Spiritism.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>34</sup> *El Iris de Paz*, 16 de mayo de 1903, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 de enero de 1901, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Allan Kardec, *¿Qué es el Espiritismo?* Edición ampliada y revisada, Málaga, Federación Espírita Española, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Suárez, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

However, we should note that Francisca Suárez's vision of Spiritism is unique, as can be observed in the following texts:

One can reach God through the sciences; through the practice of good; through love and charity; through all the moral principles laid out in Christ's Doctrine. Our God manifests Himself to us Almighty, Just, Wise, Immutable, Infinite ...

God does not condemn or redime us, because he grants us *free will* so that we may make ourselves worthy of our virtues. Thus, if we comply with the sacred precepts exemplified by Jesus, we will be happy because we will have triumphed with our persistence in doing good. But, if on the contrary, we do not comply with the precepts of a Moral life (...), we will have to live through many physical existences, that is, *reincarnation*, in order to purify ourselves by suffering through the various evolutions to which we subject ourselves.

One of the main goals of civilization and progress has to be the establishment of UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP on Earth (...) And Spiritism is responsible, as it has always been, for reforming humanity and preparing it for this goal.<sup>38</sup>

As these passages demonstrate, Francisca Suárez studied and practiced Kardecian Spiritism. Completely convinced of the morals modeled by Jesus, she defended the value and dignity of women and the poor, and dedicated herself with passion to the experimental aspects of Spiritism as a semi-mechanical medium. In *Nuestra réplica*, she publicly named the complicity of the insular Roman Catholic Church and the misogyny and oppression of turn-of-the-century Puerto Rican society. Armed with an anticlerical and freethinking ideology, she took a decolonial position that, nourished by Spiritism, challenged the New World Order, which began with the conquest of Latin America and culminated 500 years later with the violent concentration of the world's resources under the control and for the benefit of a European minority.<sup>39</sup> As a follower of Kardecian Spiritism, Francisca Suárez helped to sustain and transform Puerto Rican society during its colonial transition from Spain to the United States, offering a hopeful vision based on a spiritist, rational, and equitable moral code. As demonstrated in *Nuestra réplica*, Francisca Suárez produced a spiritist counter-discourse that promised to transform the spaces where Puerto Rican society created its laws and norms: in the home, the Church, and the State.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality," *Perú Indígena*, vol. 13, no. 29, 1992, pp. 11–20.