

HISPANIDAD

Por FREDERICK D. WILHELMOSEN (†) (*)

We celebrate this year the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Five hundred years have passed since he planted the Cross of Christ, the Cross of Burgundy, and the colours of Castille upon the sands of La Española. I regret that time does not permit me to dwell on this remarkable man, so maligned today by a secularist press too cheap to understand his grandeur. If I be permitted a personal note, I am an amateur sailor who has had the honour of sailing twice in square-rigged vessels, and with pleasure have followed Columbus' amazing first voyage to the new world through the pages of Admiral Morrison and others. But here we look, in this lecture at least, not to the man but to the adventure in history that he forwarded: *Hispanidad*.

Among all the nations of Europe from which we inherit our civilization, Spain alone has been defined by her adherence to the Catholic Faith and thus to the royal sovereignty of Christ, the only Sovereign to whom the name itself is due. Unlike other Catholic societies in our Western World, Spain —*as a nation*— is the only one that crafted itself into existence thanks to its adherence to the Catholic Thing. Before Islam swarmed into that peninsula in the eighth century, a number of Germanic kingdoms flourished in Iberia. The Visigothic invasions brought in a relatively small infusion of German blood into an order that has hitherto been basically Roman, itself formed of a population in which the earlier Iberian and Celtic elements blended with Roman Legionnaires and officials. Their presence is stamped over the whole of Spain. I think here of the famous aqueduct of Segovia begun before the birth of Our Lord and finished sometime after His Death and Resurrection. I think of roads and bridges everywhere. Very often I used to cross a Roman bridge in Avila when I lived in that walled city, the very stones of which, at their base, are often the tombs of Roman Legionnaires, the cathedral of which reposes upon a Roman temple.

(*) Universidad de Dallas (Estados Unidos de América).

The conversion of the Visigoths to Catholic orthodoxy at the Third Council of Toledo sealed that society with the stamp of Catholic orthodoxy. But there existed, in those remote centuries, nothing corresponding to «Spain» as we understand the term today. When Islam swept in, all of this was swept away. In one long cavalry charge that in time lasted little more than a decade, Celtic-Iberian-Roman-Visigothic Spain was destroyed. The forests withered and the desert came in from Africa. Islam is the enemy of trees. Brilliant and brittle cities were founded, mosques called the Islamic faithful to prayer. Spain was flooded with Mohammedanism and the only Christian political enclave that remained was a tiny mountainous pocket in the far northwest of the peninsula — Asturias. Basically Celtic, Austurians even today look like Irishmen who speak Spanish. They still play the bagpipes marking all men of Celtic inheritance. They remembered Rome and they remembered the Visigothic Kingdoms now dead. They were Catholics to a man. From these few mountaineers there commenced the vast adventure in time known as The Reconquest — 700 years of war in which Christians fought their way south and east, sometimes measured in yards and sometimes in leagues: 700 years to undo the work of one decade! They had their heroes. We think always of Cid el Campeador who took Valencia and then rode out, a dead man propped on his horse by his knights in order to instill terror in the hearts of their enemies.

By a curious paradox inscribed in history, only then was Spain born, born in the very moment in which all seemed lost. Some of the earliest documents dating from those distant centuries speak of «*las Españas perdidas*». «The Lost Spains», Spain, long before it was a political unity and even before there was even a Spanish language. Castille was already dreamed about as «what we have lost». As the philosopher Julián Marias has pointed out in his *España Inteligible*, Spain was a project before it was a reality, something «yet to be made», a hope, a promise. And at the heart of that dream there was an adherence to the Catholic Faith. Spain thus enters history as an adventure, a Holy Crusade, a Grail to be won.

Small wonder it is that in the heart of every Spaniard, no matter how ignoble or infamous his life, there has always lingered a Don Quixote, a knight in the service of the Cross. Centuries passed and the unity of Spain was knit slowly into political existence — and always it was *Catholic* Spain. Here the nation was not only subordinate to its apostolic mission, but was annealed out of the clash and dust of history by that very mission. There is no Spain without Christ. Then came the Catholic Monarchs, *los reyes católicos*, Ferdinand and Isabel — the Queen herself thought by many today to be a saint, and the taking of Grenada, the last outpost of Islamic power in the very southern tip of the peninsula.

And then Spain was itself —altogether one and Catholic—, formed by men who then could rest on their horses, swords sheathed and spears at peace, chain mail covering their bodies, and crosses everywhere lifted to the sky as the chivalry of Castile and Aragon slowly entered that last bastion of infidelity, the

Holy Sacrament carried before them. «For Spain and for St. James» —for was not the body of the Apostle in repose in Compostela far to the north? And did not that holy Apostle stir from his tomb and quicken with his ghostly presence the warriors of the cross far to the south? Did he not come back, whenever the trumpets called and mounted knights took to stirrup, buckled on armour, seated home lances, and unsheathed swords? A society of warriors, of men, Catholic Spain was led by a woman, Isabel of Castile. When someone baited her at court — I do not know which court because she and her husband were always on the march — what three things most pleased her, she answered: «A pregnant woman, a priest saying Mass, and a thief hanging at a cross-road». Catholic Spain was a bomb, ticking, waiting for the match that could send it marching again.

By that time, 1492, Europe was fashioning itself into national states, the main languages the West know today were then spoken from London to Warsaw, the old medieval dust of distinct fiefdoms and castles was giving away to centralized states — and all of these monarchies represented a new sense of national unity, for good and for evil.

But Spain and Spain alone stood for nothing other than Christ. The then reigning pope, Alexander VI, he of a bad press, knew that and he gave to Ferdinand and Isabel the title of «Catholic Monarchs». Spain was now one. But what was she to do? A project, a proposal, a dream, an adventure, never ends. Although yearning forever for a goal, a repose, rest, *pax*, the adventurer knows — if but implicitly and deep in his heart — that if he gains the crown of victory, if he succeeds in his quest, he will cease to be himself. For the adventurer his existence is one with the quest. Spain was the adventure and in this case Spain, already won, had to be won again.

I am tempted to say that Spain had to explode outward if she were to remain faithful to her mission because Spain through 700 years of battle, three times and more the life of the United States — was formed *as a mission and as nothing else!* «*Soy católico, apostólico, romano*»: I am an «Apostolic, Roman Catholic» in the typical answer a Spaniard gives when asked his religion. It is *apostolic*, hence warlike, extraverted, looking to a world of infidels to be saved. Even today their missionaries cover the world.

And then an Italian sailor from Genoa, Christopher Columbus, named «The Christ Bearer», backed financially but only just barely backed, set sail for the West and discovered America. The repose merited by knights and their vassals who had taken Grenada and united the peninsula, was taken from them. He was there at Grenada on foot, when the Christian knights, mounted, entered Grenada. It is my conviction that at the bottom of their hearts any of them were delighted. Spain was again on the move. Grenada is conquered in 1492: Spain united. America is discovered in the same year, October 12, only one day after the Universal Church celebrated the Maternity of Blessed Mary Virgin. And Spain stirs again —her nervous genius on the arch, her future *conquistado-*

res sprung from the soil of her most impoverished province, Extremadura. But this time Spain did not mount horse and charge. She took to the waters and cleaved hulls to the west. We all know what happened. America is colonized, evangelized, the pagan idols are thrown from their pedestals on high and never again was a living man or woman or child sacrificed to those awful divinities. It has been estimated that the Aztec tyranny sacrificed more than fifteen thousand men, women, and children to their hideous gods in the very year Cortes took Mexico City. It is difficult to understand how they could have killed that many in the elaborate and savage blood liturgy that ripped out the hearts of the still living victims and then tumbled their bodies down to the mob below the high altars to be ripped apart, limb by limb, and eaten. The Spaniards came as conquerors but as liberators as well. They came, these fierce men from Extremadura, bent on Gold, Glory, and God. The proportions of this cocktail varied from man to man but a massive fact remains. They conquered, evangelized, and civilized. They married the natives. They formed a new race. A contemporary Mexican philosopher argues that the *mestizaje* mingling of Indian and Spanish blood, originally biological as are all minglings of races, rapidly became spiritual and the peculiar soul which is Mexico resides in the heart of every Mexican, be of mixed blood or not. The truth is evident in the peculiar style of Baroque that sprang up everywhere in that vast and fascinating land.

The cross reigns everywhere from the new town of San Francisco in California to Tierra del Fuego at the end of the world, Cape Horn, where the great westerly winds signal to man that his conquest must give way to the blind dictates of nature.

It is said by some Spaniards and other that the Spanish monarchy died with the death of the son of the Catholic Kings, Don Juan. Often in years past I have pondered the destiny of this nation over his magnificent alabaster tomb in the Monastery of Santo Tomas in Avila. Upon leaving that grim Dominican pile that broods, a giant at rest, and glancing back upon the coat of arms emblazoned over the main portal, I have known that the judgment is false. The arms of Castilla and Aragon and Leon and Navarra and Catalonia are not completed there at their base with the pomegranate of Grenada. The monastery was built before the storming of the last bastion of Islam. And then I have walked, just a summer ago — heaving uphill, it takes 17 minutes — to the great wall, itself 1,000 years old. An then I have gone through the Plaza de Santa Teresa — named after Spain's great mystic — not yet born — contemplated the coat of arms mounted above the entrance into the old town, and there I found, I find, the same coat of arms but completed below with the pomegranate of Grenada.

Then I knew that Spain is never completed. The old monarchy did not die with the death of that young prince (legend and possibly truth has it that he died of love). When the House of Austria came to Spain in the person of Charles I — King of Spain and the fifth emperor of that name of the Holy Roman

Empire — he carried within him Spanish blood. His mother was the famous mad princess, Juana la Loca. But Charles entered Spain, a man from Flanders, and he spoke, then in his 17th year, not a word of Spanish.

The Spanish *cortes* or parliament insisted that he learn the tongue of his new kingdoms. He did, but he always spoke Spanish with a heavy Flemish accent. Once when addressing the Pope in Rome at a time when it was customary to speak in Latin (in which language Charles was fluent), he gave his discourse in Castillian — noting, before the Holy Father, «that Castillian is a tongue worthy of any Christian». Today when simple Spaniards for the countryside are irritated with someone who speaks in another language, they do not say: «Speak to me in Spanish, in Castillian». They say: «speak to me in Christian» — *háblame en cristiano*. They reflect through the centuries the proud boast of their king-emperor — a man born and bred in what is today Belgium who consciously turned himself into a Spaniard. And to be a Spaniard is to speak Christian! Charles died where he retired, in the Monastery of Yuste in Extramadura: born in a northern country, buried in the land of his choice — that great man once faced Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. Charles listened from the throne to Luther's famous address at the Diet of Worms in Hesse in which he stated before the assembled princes of the Holy Roman Empire, «Here I stand: I can do no other». The Emperor dismissed the Diet and said he would give his reply on the following day. We do know that Charles subsequently consulted with a number of the princes but we can easily imagine that during that night he went through some kind of Golgatha. The whole Empire was waiting on his word, half of the princes in the north were already adherents to the new religion of Luther, half of them in the south Catholic but wavering, all the rest doubtful of the outcome and ready to spring one way or another. Many of the princes smelled as does a dog blood the immense plunder of the lands of the Church, rich and verdant, lying before their eyes, ripe to be plucked.

The King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor, the young heir to half Europe, slowly mounted the great throne, burdened by the weight of the imperial purpel, ungainly, and, in those early years of his life, unsure of himself physically. Later he was to be a hero storming Tunis sword in hand. Then he was awkward, shy. Charles was an ugly man. He was prepared to face Luther but his adversary had absented himself from the proceedings. Guaranteed safe-conduct by the emperor himself, he may already have flown the coop. But Luther's ringing defiance of the day before resounded, if but by silence, in the great hall of the German Diet. Every prince, secular and ecclesiastical, was in attendance and the fate of Christendom was in the air.

The Habsburg monarch had not yet learned Spanish. His native Flemish was too provincial for an address of such international import. His German was weak. His Latin excellent, but he spoke in French. I excerpt from his address from the throne:

«You know that I am descended from the most Christian emperors of the noble German nation, from the Catholic Kings of Spain, the archdukes of Austria, and the dukes of Burgundy, who were all to the death true sons of the Roman Church, defenders of the Catholic faith and of his sacred customs, decrees, rituals and ordinances. They have bequeathed all this to me as my heritage, to live and die according to their example, which I have hitherto done. For this reason I am determined to hold fast to all that has happened since the Council of Constance. For it is certain that a single monk must err in his opinion if he stands against all of Christendom; otherwise, Christendom itself would have erred for more than a thousand years.

Therefore, I am determined to set my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood, my life, and my soul upon it. For it would be a great shame to me and to you, who are the noble and renowned German nation, called to be defenders and protectors of the Catholic faith, if in our time through our negligence we were to let heresy, or even the appearance of heresy, and the repudiation of true religion enter the hearts of man».

At that very moment, thousands of miles away, Hernán Cortes and his handful of Spanish *conquistadores* was marching through Mexico, periodically sending letters back to His Most Catholic King, Charles I, informing him of his progress. The Emperor-King returned to Spain and learned its language, a foreigner if not by blood then certainly by upbringing. He became a Spaniard and the imperial defence of Christendom married *Hispanidad*. The wedding ring was the House of Austria. Spain was again on the move, it set itself against the nationalisms aborning all over Europe. *Hispanidad* was bent on Christ and His Cross, then both cross and sword.

By a curious repetition what happened to Charles —not his conversion to the Faith: he was always a Catholic, but his conversion to a political ideal international and universal in its sweep that saw its goal as the conversion of the world as dictated by Our Lord Himself when he said: «there are many who are not of my flock; may there be one flock and one shepherd», what happened to Spain's King happened to his new subjects in the Americas. They became Hispanicized, *hispanizados*. A new race was born. That Hispanic world to our North American south, divided from the Federal Union by the artificial barrier of the Río Grande, has been crippled through two hundred years of bad rule, secularization, persecution of the Church, especially in Mexico in this century. But the history itself does suggest the meaning of the word, «*Hispanidad*».

The word is refractory to any translation in English or to any language with which I am acquainted. «Hispanishness» sounds awful! «Being Spanish» won't cut it because *Hispanidad* transcends «being Spanish» and there are plenty of Spaniards today and many of the occupy positions of high power in that land who reject the very concept itself. Ever since the French Revolution, both Spain

and Spanish America have been sharply and tragically divided into those who embrace «Hispanidad» and those who abominate the notion as well as the reality. Being «a Spanish buff» won't do it! What is a «Spanish buff?» I am talking about the Hemingways and the Conrads who run off over there and down deep into Mexico and fall in love with bullfights, flamenco dancing, and lissome girls flashing black eyes. As the late Professor Powell from Santa Barbara, in his illuminating book, *Tree of Hate*, wrote: «God keep me from the bull bums».

There is a kind of superficial appreciation of Spain and Spanish America found in Spanish majors in American universities and elsewhere. They often capture something of the truth as do those Scandinavian youth who fall upon Pamplona on July 7 for the great festival of the bulls. I don't blame them for escaping their socialist and secularist paradise, the boredom of those countries bereft of God and joy. After all, the ritual of the ring and the clack of castanets and the play of fans over black eyes and shining hair do capture something of the Spanish spirit. But their understanding is as shallow as was Hemingway's who, as a journalist with the Fifteenth International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, Marlene Dietrich was there with him, coddled by the Reds, described the Catholic and Carlist resistance at Quinto as the work of «those desperate brave men... I do not know how to describe them. Are they hysterical and totally without fear?». Through his binoculars he saw them with their tunics stitched with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, their red berets, their crosses — one to a company, and a handful of them held back on that day all the forces of hell. Hemingway did not understand. I say this with sorrow because he was a great writer.

To be a Catholic for a tradicionalist Spaniard is to be, as I have noted: «*católico, apostólico, romano*». Hispanidad is quintessentially apostolic, Hispanidad is not a race. A race is something over and done with. Only boring men think overmuch about their race. Each of us has the blood he has and that is the whole of it and the end of it!

In our American Southwest, the attempt to convert our Mexican-Americans into *chicanos* — a word with neither dignity nor history — to raise the banner of *chicanismo*, is not only to debase, but to deny as well, a high vocation. I have said it: I repeat it: each man has the race into which he was born, a card dealt from eternity. Race is the result of a past. It cannot be a vocation which suggests always a future, a «call», an adventure.

In these reflections on re-evangelization, permit me to repeat what I have many times said to Americans of Mexican descent, men from my own part of the world. I am, by choice and adoption a Texan, a Tejano. You were not born to be converted into racists, any more than any white man was born to be a racist. The Church embraces and glories in all races and condemns most severely all racism. You were born — I say to my Mexican-American friends — with the noble Spanish tongue in order to be apostles. My call to them is always the follo-

wing: do what your inheritance calls you to do be yourselves but be better than yourselves! Convert the world! Don't tell me this is impossible! I know that it is impossible but only the impossible is worth the chase. I speak here in Catholic Bavaria and I tell you that the whole American Southwest waits on the cross of Christ and on the saving balm of His Church. Go out and evangelize the heathen. *This* is Hispanidad.

I have not a drop of Spanish or Indian blood in my veins. I am a Danish, German, and Swiss cocktail and bloody proud of it. But I consider myself to be an Hispano. My model is the Emperor-King Charles I and the V, born and bred a Fleming but who died a Spaniard. Do not tell me that many Spaniards today as yesterday deny their inheritance. I know all those things and I have no time here to dwell on their betrayal.

We are here to speak of Evangelization and I have been invited, I presume, to say something about my own country. Today in the American Southwest we have an Hispanic population growing at an amazing rate because it does not fear children and an Anglo-American population declining because it does. A world spread over several states waits to be won for Christ. There are only three alternatives: either the Protestant sects with their negations and their tunnel vision of life, win, or the secularists win with their denial of God and His Law, with their agenda which includes the murder of the unborn, their utterly boring and uninteresting culture, totally without colour or passion or style — they win; *or we win.*

My country today is on the verge of a racial conflagration. The recent riots in Los Angeles with their burning and looting and murdering is only a pimple revealing a disease raging through our body politic. Black hates white and white hates black. The only difference is that white cannot say so because of a liberal press — itself white— which is frozen by guilt. It is highly possible that some Americans sense guilt about the racial discrepancies and injustices that plague my country. But I am here today to tell you that our Catholic ancestors had nothing to do with this. Possibly somebody or some group is guilty. I am not here to argue the thesis. But *we* are not guilty.

When England landed on those Atlantic shores a good 100 and more years after Mexico already was dotted with convents and monasteries, schools and hospitals, libraries and a university, those early English colonists either killed the Indians or pushed them west. They made no significant attempts to convert them to their own brand of Protestant Christianity. But in Spanish America, the blood of Spain mingled with that of the Indians and a new race was created which today numbers into the tens of millions.

I am convinced personally that the English failed to mingle with the North American Indians not because they were English. That would be a form of racism itself, would it not? Their attitude was rooted rather in their peculiar conception of Christianity. *They* were the saved, the Puritans, the Pilgrims. Why,

asks my good friend, himself an Anglican, Dr. Thomas Landas, do we like the Pilgrims and dislike the Puritans when they were one and the same people? The came to form a «godly city», a New Jerusalem. Maybe it has something to do with turkeys and Thanksgiving day. This handful who fled the liberty and grace, the beauty of Stuart England, was predestined from all eternity by their God for salvation, whereas the vast mass of humanity was condemned to Hell altogether without regard for their merits. A kind of *exclusivism* marked the Calvinist Protestant character. The New Jerusalem was already won. It was here: the city of a «godly people» (as they called themselves) who peered out from behind their rifles and pitchforks at a hostile world, given over to sin and full of corruption.

Hispanidad, on the contrary, has always been as open as are the arms of the cross. Inequalities and injustices these have always been, everywhere, but none were based on race or nationality. If we are to be apostles in the American Southwest and in this lecture I stand before you as a man from that part of the world, I suggest that we must return to our own inheritance, we must argue not from premises drawn up by men foreign to ourselves but from our own. Did not Pope Pius XI in his magnificent encyclical on Christ The King, *Quas Primas*, speak of His yoke as being light and sweet, of the enormous benefits that fall like ripe fruit on any political order that recognizes His Sovereignty? What blessing would come to us if we bent our hearts to «restore all things in Christ?». The grace in beauty, the transformation of the very landscape as creation itself is offered up to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, the sweetness of a justice tempered with mercy, all this and more can be hoped for — but never, of course, presumed.

When the enemy has been upon us in modern times, when the Church was persecuted in Mexico sixty years ago and in Spain a half century ago — it was then that men remembered Christ is Our Lord, not only the sweet Jesus of popular devotion (He is that, of course) but He is also the Pantocrator, the Lord of the Universe. And it was then that the blood of martyrs became the seed for a holy harvest.

What a century this has been! The Cristeros in Mexico with the cry of «*Viva Cristo Rey*»; The Spanish *requetés* with their Sacred Hearts stitched over their own, their cocky red berets, their crosses and rifles, with the very same cry: «*Viva Cristo Rey*». The cry, relatively recent in history, is a splendid affirmation of the meaning of Hispanidad. Many a Cuban patriot against Castro went to his death before a firing squad with the same cry: ¡*Viva Cristo Rey!* When the gates of hell are open and the forces of evil are upon us, everything secondary and trivial falls away and reality reveals itself in terms of its stark ultimates. I am either for Christ or I am against Him. All other considerations, economic and ecumenical, political and social, fall away as eternity stares a man in the face. Thousands of those *Cristeros* died in Mexico. Ten thousand priests and re-

ligious were murdered in Spain between 1936 and 1939 and not a one aposticized. This century has given more martyrs to the glory of God than any other, including the times of Diocletian when Christians were thrown to the lions. This is the twentieth century's lone claim to fame. Otherwise we all ought to agree with Stephen Leacock: «It is a mark of decency to be ashamed to have been born in the twentieth century», century of tyranny, butchery, murder by the millions, betrayal, and ultimately—boredom. No gentleman feels at home within the confines of its years.

What was it that the great Spanish historian Menéndez Pelayo wrote about Spain?

«Spain, evangelizer of half the world; Spain, hammer of the heretics; the light of Trent, the sword of Rome; the cradle of St. Ignatius: that is our grandeur and our unity. We have none other».

Hispanidad is larger than Spain and larger even than the world Spain evangelized. Hispanidad is a call to transcendence, a surrender of self and world to their God. There is a magnificent painting in the Escorial, the monastery palace built by King Philip II, which depicts himself and his father Charles I and the V, holding up to the Holy Trinity in glory the crowns of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, the social and political order at the service of its only Sovereign, Christ — Our Lord and Our King. To this mission we here are called.