

HISPANIDAD

by Frederick D. Wilhelmsen



This year we celebrate 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 colors of Castile on the sands of *La Española*. I regret that time does not permit me to dwell on this remarkable man, so maligned today by a secular press too cheap to understand his grandeur. On a personal note, I am an amateur sailor who has had the honor of sailing twice in square-rigged vessels, and I have enjoyed following Columbus' amazing first voyage to the New World through the pages of Admiral Morrison and others. But here, at least in this lecture, we are not looking at the man, but at the adventure in history that he carried forward: *Hispanidad*.

Of all the nations of Europe from which we inherit our civilization, Spain alone has been defined by its 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 has come into existence thanks to its adherence to the Catholic Faith. Before Islam invaded the peninsula in the eighth century, a number of Germanic kingdoms flourished in Iberia. The Visigothic invasions brought a relatively small infusion of German blood into what had been an essentially Roman order, itself made up of a population in which the earlier Iberian and Celtic elements blended with Roman legionaries and officials. Their presence was felt throughout Spain. I think of the famous aqueduct of Segovia, begun before the birth of Our Lord and completed some time after His Death and Resurrection, I think of roads and bridges everywhere. Very often I crossed a Roman bridge in Avila when I lived in that walled city, whose stones, at their base, were often the tombs of Roman legionaries, and whose cathedral rests on a Roman temple.

The conversion of the Visigoths to Catholic orthodoxy at the Third Council of Toledo sealed this society with the stamp of Catholic orthodoxy. But in those distant centuries there was nothing like "Spain" as we understand the term today. When Islam came, all that was swept away. In one long cavalry charge, lasting little more than a decade, Celtic-Iberian-Roman-Visigothic Spain was destroyed. The forests withered and the desert moved 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 of Asturias. Basically Celtic, Asturians even today look like Irishmen speaking Spanish. They still play the bagpipes that mark all men of Celtic heritage. They remembered Rome and they remembered the Visigothic kingdoms, now dead. They were all Catholics. From these few mountaineers began the great adventure in time known as the Reconquest - 700 years in which Christians fought their way south and east, sometimes measured in yards and sometimes in leagues: 700 years to undo the work of a decade! They had their heroes. We always think of *El Cid Campeador*, who took Valencia and then rode out, a dead man propped up on his horse by his knights, to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies.

By a curious paradox inscribed in history, it was then that Spain was born, at the very moment when all seemed lost. Some of the earliest documents from those distant centuries speak of "*las Españas perdidas*", "The Lost Spains", Spain, long before it was a political entity and even before there was a Spanish language. Castile was already dreamed of as "what we have lost". As the philosopher Julián Marías pointed out in his book *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 this dream was the adherence to the Catholic Faith. Spain thus enters history as an adventure, a Holy Crusade, a Grail to be won.

No wonder that in the heart of every Spaniard, no matter how ignoble or infamous his life, there has always been a Don Quixote, a knight in the service of the Cross. Centuries passed and the unity of Spain was slowly woven into political existence, and it was always *Catholic Spain*. Here the nation has not only been subordinated to its apostolic mission, but has been annealed from the clashes and dust of history by this very mission. There is no Spain without Christ. Then came the Catholic Monarchs, *los reyes católicos*, Ferdinand and Isabel - the Queen herself is now considered by many to be a saint - and the taking of Granada, the last outpost of Islamic power at the southernmost tip of the peninsula.

And then Spain was herself, one and Catholic, made up of men who could then rest on their horses, swords sheathed and spears in peace, chain mail covering their bodies, and crosses everywhere, raised to the sky, as the knighthood of Castile and Aragon slowly entered that last bastion of infidelity, carrying the Holy Sacrament before them. "*For Spain and for St. James,*" for was not the body of the Apostle at rest in Compostela, far to the north? And did not this holy Apostle stir from his tomb and inspire with his ghostly presence the warriors of the Cross far to the south? Did he not come back when the trumpets called and the mounted knights took to their stirrups, buckled on their armor, took up their lances and unsheathed their swords? A society of warriors, of men, Catholic Spain was led by a woman, Isabel of Castile. When someone at court - I do not know which court, because she and her husband were always on the move - tried to bait her by asking her what three things she liked best, she replied: "*A pregnant woman, a priest saying Mass, and a thief hanging at the crossroads.*" Catholic Spain was a bomb, ticking, waiting for the match that would send it back on the march.

At that time, in 1492, Europe was forming into nation-states, the major languages of the West known today were then spoken from London to Warsaw, the old medieval dust of distinct fiefdoms and castles giving way to centralized states, and all these monarchies representing a new sense of national unity, for good and evil.

But Spain and Spain alone stood for nothing but Christ. The reigning Pope, Alexander VI, he of bad press, knew this and he gave Ferdinand and Isabel the title of "*Catholic Monarchs*". Spain was now one. But what was it to do? A project, a proposal, a dream, an adventure that never ends. Although he yearns for a goal, a rest, pax, the adventurer knows, if only implicitly and deep in his heart, that if he wins 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 it was to remain faithful to its mission, because Spain, through 700 years of battles, three times and more the existence of the United States, *was formed as a mission and as nothing else!*

"Soy católico, apostólico, romano": I am "Apostolic, Roman Catholic" is the typical answer that a Spaniard gives when asked about his religion. It is *apostolic*, therefore militant, extraverted, looking at a world of infidels to be saved. Even today its missionaries cover the world.

And then an Italian sailor from Genoa, Christopher Columbus, called "The Christ Bearer", supported financially but just barely, set sail for the West and discovered America. The repose deserved by the knights and their vassals, who had taken Granada and united the peninsula, was taken from them. He was there, on foot, when the Christian knights entered Granada on horseback. I am convinced that every one of them rejoiced in his heart. Spain was on the move again. Granada was conquered in 1492: Spain was united. America was discovered that same year, on October 12, just one day after the Universal Church celebrated the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And Spain once again stirred her nervous genius on the arch, her future *conquistadores* sprung from the soil of her most impoverished province, Extremadura. But this time, Spain did not mount a horse and charge. It took to the water and sliced the hulls to the west. We all know what happened.

The Americas were colonized, evangelized, the pagan idols were thrown off their high pedestals, and never again was a living man, woman, or child sacrificed to those awful deities. It is estimated that the Aztec tyranny sacrificed more than fifteen thousand men, women, and children to their hideous gods in the very year that Cortes took Mexico City. It is difficult to understand how they could have killed so many in the elaborate and savage blood liturgy in which the hearts of the still-living victims were torn out and then their bodies thrown to the mob below the high altars to be torn apart and eaten limb by limb. The Spanish came as conquerors, but also as liberators. They came, these fierce men from Extremadura, bent on Gold, Glory and God. The proportions of this cocktail varied from man to man, but one massive fact remains. They conquered, they evangelized, they civilized. They married the natives. They formed a new race. A contemporary Mexican philosopher argues that the *mestizaje* blending of Indian and Spanish blood, originally biological like all blending of races, quickly became spiritual and that the peculiar soul that is Mexico resides in the heart of every Mexican, whether of mixed blood or not. The truth is evident in the peculiar style of Baroque that has sprung up throughout this 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 conquests must give way to the blind dictates of nature.

It is said by some Spanish and others 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 at the coat of arms emblazoned over the main portal, I have known that the judgment is false. The arms of Castile and Aragon and Leon and Navarre and Catalonia are not completed there at their base with the pomegranate of Granada. 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. And then I walked through the Plaza de Santa Teresa, named after Spain's great mystic - not yet born - and contemplated the coat of arms mounted above the entrance to the old town, and there I found, I find, the same coat of arms, but completed below with the pomegranate of Granada.

Then I knew that Spain is never completed. The old monarchy did not die with the death of that young prince (legend, and perhaps 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, then in his 17th year, did not speak a word of Spanish.

The Spanish *Cortes*, or parliament, insisted that he learn the tongue of his new kingdoms. He did so, 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 (which Charles was fluent in), he delivered his speech in Castilian, remarking to the Holy Father that "*Castilian is a tongue worthy of any Christian.*" Today, when simple country Spaniards are irritated by someone who speaks in another language, they do not say: "Speak to me in Spanish, in Castilian". They say: "Speak to me in Christian" - *háblame en cristiano*. They echo, through the centuries, the proud boast of their king - emperor - a man born and raised in what is now Belgium, who consciously made himself Spanish. And to be Spanish is to be Christian! Charles died where he retired, in the Monastery of Yuste in Extremadura: born in a northern land, buried in the land of his choice, this great man once faced Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. From his throne, Charles listened to Luther's famous speech at the Diet of Worms in Hesse, in which he declared to 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 answer the next day. We know that Charles then consulted with some of the princes, but we can easily imagine that he went through a kind of Golgotha that night. The whole empire was waiting for his word, half of the princes in the north were already adherents of the new religion of Luther, half of them in the south were Catholic but wavering, and all the rest doubted the outcome and were ready to spring one way or the other. Many of the princes, like a dog, sniffed the immense plunder of the Church's lands, rich and green, lying before them, ripe for the picking.

The King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, the young heir to half of Europe, slowly ascended the great throne, burdened by the weight of the imperial purple, awkward and, in those early years of his life, physically insecure. Later he would be a hero, storming Tunis with 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 might have already flown the coop. But Luther's ringing defiance of the previous day echoed, if only in silence, in the great hall of the German Diet. Every prince, secular and ecclesiastical, was present, and the fate of Christendom hung in the air.

The Habsburg monarch had not yet learned Spanish. His native Flemish was too provincial for an address of such international importance. His German was weak. His Latin was excellent, but he spoke in French. I quote from his speech 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 until death true sons of the Roman Church, defenders of the Catholic Faith and of its sacred customs, decrees, rituals, and ordinances. They have bequeathed all this to me as my inheritance, so that I may live and die according to their example, as I have done until now. For this reason I am determined to hold fast to all that has happened since the Council of Constance. For it is certain that an individual monk must err in his opinion if he goes against the whole of Christendom; otherwise Christendom itself would have been in error for more than a thousand years.

Therefore, I am determined to stake my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood, my life, and my soul on it. For it would be a great shame to me and to you, the noble and illustrious German nation, called to be the defenders and protectors of the Catholic Faith, if in our time, by our negligence, we should allow heresy, or even the appearance of heresy, and the repudiation of True Religion to enter into the hearts of men".

At that very moment, thousands of miles away, Hernán Cortés and his handful of Spanish *conquistadores* were marching through Mexico, periodically sending letters back to His Most Catholic Majesty, Charles I, informing him of their progress. The Emperor-King returned to Spain and learned its language, a foreigner if not by blood then certainly by upbringing. He became Spanish and the imperial defense of Christendom married *Hispanidad*. The wedding ring was the House of Austria. Spain was on the move again,

standing up to the nationalisms that were spreading throughout Europe. *Hispanidad* embraced Christ and His Cross, then both the Cross and the sword.

By a curious repetition, what happened to Charles was not his conversion to the Faith: he had always been a Catholic, but his conversion to a political ideal international and universal in its scope, which saw its goal in the conversion of the world, as Our Lord Himself dictated when He said: "*There are many who are not of my flock; may there be one flock and one shepherd*", what happened to the King of Spain happened to his new subjects in the Americas. They were Hispanized, *hispanizados*. A new race was born. This Hispanic world to the south of North America, separated from the federal union by the artificial barrier of the Río Grande, has been crippled by two hundred years of bad rule, secularization, and persecution of the Church, especially in Mexico in this century. But history itself suggests the meaning of the word "*Hispanidad*".

The word defies any translation into English or any language I know. "Hispanishness" sounds awful! "Being Spanish" doesn't cut it, because *Hispanidad* transcends "being Spanish" and there are many Spanish today, and many of those who occupy positions of high power in that land, who reject the very concept. Since the French Revolution, both Spain and Spanish America have been sharply and tragically divided between those who embrace "*Hispanidad*" and those who abhor both the concept and the reality. Being a "Spanish buff" doesn't suffice! What is a "Spanish buff"? I am talking about the Hemingways and the Conrads who run over there and down into Mexico and fall in love with bullfights, flamenco dancing, and lissome girls flashing black eyes. As the late Professor Powell of Santa Barbara wrote in his illuminating book, *Tree of Hate*: "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 youths who descend on 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 does capture something of the Spanish spirit. But their understanding is as shallow as Hemingway's, who, as a journalist with the Fifteenth International Brigade during the

Spanish Civil War, with Marlene Dietrich at his side, pampered by the Reds, described the Catholic and Carlist resistance in Quinto as the work of "*those desperate brave men...I do not know how to describe them. Are they hysterical and completely without fear?*" Through his binoculars he saw them with their tunics embroidered with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, their red berets, their crosses one per company, and a handful of them that day held back 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 traditionalist Hispanic is, as I have noted: "*católico, apostólico, romano*". *Hispanidad* is profoundly apostolic, *Hispanidad* is not a race. A race is something that is over and done with. Only boring men think too much about their race. Each one of us has the blood he has, and that is the whole and the end of it!

In our American Southwest, the attempt to turn our Mexican-Americans into *chicanos* - a word without dignity or history - to raise the banner of *chicanismo*, is not only to degrade but to deny a high calling. I have said it before and I reiterate: Every man has the race into which he was born, a card dealt by eternity. Race is the result of a past. It cannot be a vocation that always suggests a future, a "call", an adventure.

These reflections on re-evangelization permit me to repeat what I have often said to Americans of Mexican descent, men from my own part of the world. I am a Texan, a *Tejano*, by choice and by adoption. 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 glorifies all races and severely condemns all racism. You were born, I tell my Mexican-American friends in their noble Spanish tongue, to be apostles. My call to them is always this: do what your inheritance calls you to do, be yourselves, but be better than yourselves! Convert the world! Don't tell me it's impossible! I know it is impossible, but only the impossible is worth pursuing. I speak here in Catholic Bavaria, and I tell you that the whole American Southwest is waiting for the Cross of Christ and 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 damn proud of it. But I consider myself a *Hispano*. My model is the Emperor-King Charles I and V, who was born and raised Flemish, but died Spanish. Do not

tell me that today, as yesterday, many Hispanics deny their inheritance. I know all these 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 suppose, to say something about my own country. Today, in the American Southwest, we have a Hispanic population that is growing at an astonishing rate because it is not afraid of children, and an Anglo population that is declining because it is. A world spread over several states is waiting to be won for Christ. There are only three alternatives: either the Protestant sects win with their negations and their tunnel vision of life, or the secularists win with their denial of God and His Law, with their agenda that includes the murder of the unborn, their utterly boring and uninteresting culture, without color 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 murder, are but 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 that is itself white and frozen with guilt. It is quite possible that some Americans feel guilty 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 it. Perhaps someone or some group is guilty. I am not here to argue that thesis. But *we* are not guilty.

When England landed on those Atlantic shores a good 100 and more years after Mexico was already 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, Spanish blood mingled with Indian blood to create a new race that now numbers in the tens of millions.

I am personally convinced that the English did not intermarry with the North American Indians because they were English. That would itself be a form of racism, would it not? Rather, their attitude was rooted in their peculiar conception of Christianity. *They* were the saved, the Puritans, the Pilgrims. Why, asks my good friend, an Anglican himself, Dr. Thomas Landas, do we like the Pilgrims and dislike the Puritans, if they were one and the same people? They came to build a "godly city," a New Jerusalem. Maybe it has something

to do with turkeys and Thanksgiving. This handful, who had fled the liberty and grace, the beauty, of Stuart England, were predestined for salvation by their God from all eternity, while the vast mass of humanity was condemned to Hell, regardless of their merits. A kind of *exclusivism* characterized the Calvinist Protestant character. The New Jerusalem had already been won. It was here: the city of a "God-fearing people" (as they called themselves) who looked out from behind their rifles and pitchforks at a hostile world, given over to sin and full of corruption.

Hispanidad, on the other hand, has always been as open as the arms of the Cross. There have always been inequalities and injustices, everywhere, but none 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 patrimony, we must not argue from premises drawn up by men foreign to us, but form our own. Did not Pope Pius XI, in his magnificent encyclical on Christ the King, *Quas Primas*, speak of His yoke as light and sweet, of the enormous benefits that fall like ripe fruit on any political order that recognizes His Sovereignty? What blessings would come to us if we bent our hearts to "Restore all things in Christ"? The grace of beauty, the transformation of the very landscape as creation itself is offered 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 of course never presumed.

When the enemy was upon us in modern times, when the Church was persecuted in Mexico sixty years ago and in Spain half a century ago, it was then that people remembered that 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 the martyrs became the seed of a holy harvest.

What a century that was! The *Cristeros* in Mexico with the cry, "*¡Viva Cristo Rey!*"; the Spanish *Requetés* with their Sacred Hearts embroidered over their own, their proud red berets, their crosses and guns, with the same cry: "*¡Viva Cristo Rey!*". This cry, relatively recent in history, is a magnificent affirmation of the meaning of *Hispanidad*. Many an anti-Castro Cuban patriot 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 is revealed in its stark ultimatums. Either I am

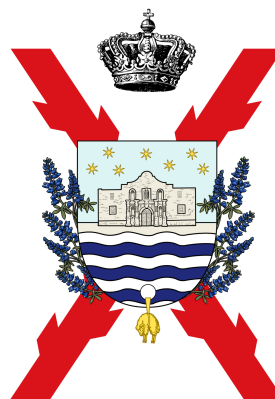
with Christ or I am against Him. All other considerations, economic and ecumenical, political and social, fall away when eternity stares a man in the face. Thousands of *Cristeros* died in Mexico. Ten thousand priests and religious were murdered in Spain between 1936 and 1939, and not a single one apostatized. This century has given more martyrs for the glory of God than any other, including the time of Diocletian, when Christians were thrown to the lions. This is the twentieth century's sole claim to fame. Otherwise, we should all agree with Stephen Leacock: "It is a mark of decency to be ashamed to have been born in the twentieth century," a century of tyranny, slaughter, murder by the millions, betrayal, and, ultimately, boredom. No gentleman feels at home within the confines of its years.

What did the great Spanish historian Menéndez Pelayo write about Spain?

"Spain, evangelizer of half the world; Spain, hammer of heretics; the light of Trent, the sword of Rome; the cradle of St. Ignatius: this is our greatness and our unity. We have no other".

Hispanidad is greater than Spain and greater even than the world that Spain evangelized. *Hispanidad* is a call to transcendence, a surrender of self and world to God. In the Escorial, the monastic palace built by King Philip II, there is a magnificent painting in which he and his father, Charles I and V, raise the crowns of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire in glory before the Holy Trinity, the social and political order at the service of its only Sovereign, Christ, Our Lord and Our King.

It is to this mission that we are called.



TRADITIONALIST CARLIST CIRCLE