

OUR SPANISH WAY OF LIFE

MARGARITA S. DE PLANELLES

IN these days, when Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America excite in so high a degree our political interest, it seems proper to consider thoroughly the peculiarities of the Spanish way of life and of Spanish culture. This is especially true from the point of view of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, and particularly that of the United States, whose political and economic interests, now during the war more than ever, coincide with relations to Latin-American neighbors. For this a better knowledge of Spanish culture and the Spanish way of life is necessary.

For in spite of Wendell Willkie's *One World*, and in spite of the fact that modern engineering makes it possible to circumnavigate the globe in ninety-six hours, while Jules Verne's famous voyage around the world took eighty days and Magellanes's first circumnavigation of the world took three years, the differences between the various peoples and cultures have changed very little from Magellanes to Willkie. Neither do the faster means of transportation offer a guarantee that the contemporaries of Willkie have twenty-five times the understanding of national characteristics possessed by the contemporaries of Jules Verne, or three hundred times that of Magellanes's contemporaries.

So it is with the widely spread hope that the modern "One World-Traffic" will make future wars impossible. Cain slew his brother Abel with a stone axe. The Romans conquered for themselves a world empire with the Short-Sword; Ghengis Khan conquered a still larger empire with his shaggy horses: the "Progress", from the musket of the Thirty Years War to the machine gun of the First World War and the Rocket-Bomb of the Second World War, has not altered the world very much and, least of all, has abolished war. Such considerations alone should make clear how little technical advance and "Progress" basically change the soul of man or do away with the differences between races. Neither does greater proximity by itself bring greater knowledge or friendlier feelings. Rather the contrary! The greater the proximity, the greater the friction; as everyone knows from his everyday experience.

Regarding a mutual understanding of individuals as well as peoples for each other, there is only one way, which was always

the same and will always be the same; namely, knowledge of the background, the development, the character, the interests and present-day conditions of life. All that in a spirit of tolerance and of love for the dissimilarity of the other! History, national character and everyday life, therefore, offer the key to the understanding of a people, and it is only from this understanding that a real "Good Neighbor Policy" can develop.

This article is an attempt to make a small contribution to this end, by throwing light upon some especially important points which seem of consequence to a knowledge of Spanish culture and Spanish character, especially in the way in which they are opposed to Anglo-Saxon culture and to Anglo-Saxon character.

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In Spanish history there were three particular epoch-making events, which were of the greatest influence upon the course of this history and on the development of Spanish character: the deliverance of the Occident and of Christianity from the Arabic flood; the discovery and conquest of the New World; finally, the second deliverance of Christianity from Islam and the Renaissance of Catholicism through the Counter-Reformation.

Almost eight hundred years of Spanish history are occupied with the tremendous battle against the Arabic flood, starting with the fateful year 711 when the Arabic commander Tarik ben Sejad began his rule over Spain with the victory of Jerez, until the year 1492, when the Royal Pair, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, re-conquered the Moorish fortress of Granada. What, however, gave this conflict its particular importance was the fact that it was not carried on for reasons of power politics alone, but was influenced by spiritual and cultural differences.

Islam or Christianity?—that was the question which had to be decided. Decided not only for Spain and the Iberian Peninsula, but for all Europe and all those countries and peoples which had been discovered or conquered by Europe. If Islam had been victorious in Spain, that Islam which in 778, after a decisive defeat, forced even Charlemagne to retreat, then the face of the world would have become different. It was Spain, the Spanish people, which in a continuous war of 800 years stayed this danger and thereby in a basic sense became the Savior of Christianity and the Occident.

In those times the Christian, the Catholic Spain took shape. Catholicism identified itself day by day, and most intimately, with national consciousness. One cannot understand the position or the rôle of the Catholic Church in Spain, if one does not know

this century-long battle between Cathedral and Mosque which occurred there. Before Catalonians, Aragonians, Navarrians etc., considered themselves Spaniards, they had been united as Catholic Christians on scores of battle fields, under the sign of the Cross, against the Green Flag of the Prophet. It was the Catholic Church which again and again reminded the princes and great ones of the land of their duty to liberate Cordova, Seville and Granada from the infidels, and to re-conquer these places for the Cross.

The spiritual character of the conflict has greatly favored the early blossoming of intellectual life in Spain, because it forced the Spaniards again and again to measure themselves, in this field also, with the highly cultured Arabians. Already in 1179, many decades and even centuries before France, England and Germany, the University of Salamanca was founded; in 1245 that of Valencia. Salamanca especially was not only a Spanish, but a European, university, to which came law students from all countries of the Occident. All these facts are for the modern Spaniard not only historic memories, but a living present, known to every Spanish child from the powerful hero-epos of the *Cid*, the prototype and ideal of every genuine Spaniard.

A hardly less powerful epoch, with equally lasting effects, was the discovery and conquest of the New World by the Spaniards.

Not only did Christopher Columbus, on Spanish ships and for their Spanish Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella, sail into the unknown and thereby discover a new continent, but Spaniards they were who then unlocked this continent, bounded and conquered it.

The Spaniard Ponce de Leon discovered and, as first white man, set foot on Florida in 1512. It was the Spaniard Vasco Nunez de Balboa who in 1513 crossed the Isthmus of Panama and was the first to see the Pacific. The Spaniard Hernando Cortez discovered and conquered, 1519-21, the mighty empire of the Aztecs in Mexico. The Spaniard Francisco Pizarro forces his way far to the south, 1531-33, and conquers Peru as well as a part of Ecuador and Bolivia. The Spaniard Fernando de Soto, in 1541, discovers the Mississippi, and, on Spanish ships and under the flag of the King of Spain, the Portuguese Fernando de Magellanes from 1514 to 1522 carries out the first circumnavigation of the world and, even with his death, gains the Philippines for Spain.

In all this, Christianity and service for the Catholic Church is for these men no less an incentive than the spreading of the law and of the power of the Spanish King. In Spanish Central and South America spring up the earliest and most beautiful Cathedrals on the new continent; and the first Universities and the first printing presses in the New World made their appearance there. Every South American is proud of this to this day. Then it was, in 1493, that a Pope divided the world between Spain and Portugal, giving Brazil to Portugal, for which reason Brazil, alone of Latin American countries, speaks Portuguese. The effects of these happenings determine the history of Spain for the next four hundred years, until the Spanish-American war of 1898 deprived the Spanish Motherland of the last remnants of this powerful Spanish world empire.

The third heroic act of Spanish history was the second deliverance of Christianity, followed and accompanied by the great Reform Movement within the Catholic Church.

Again it was Islam which, after destroying the East Roman empire, advanced by way of Rhodes and Malta to the conquest of Europe, until the victory of the Spanish fleet at Lepanto, in 1571, under the Spanish prince Juan de Austria, threw Islam back to the East for good.

While Spain by this victory made a decisive contribution to the deliverance of the entire Occidental Christianity, the purification and renaissance of the Catholic Church is in a still higher degree the work of a Spaniard, of the great Ignatius Loyola. This Spanish-Basque nobleman renewed the Catholic Church, which had been shaken by the Reformation of the 16th century spiritually as well as in its organization. By his Jesuit Order he created a new spiritual leadership for the Pope. Of this heroic history of Spain we find an echo in the brave fight of Spain against Napoleon, whereby, it may be said, Spain again became the Savior of Europe. For in Spain Napoleon was conquered, even before the Beresina and Leipzig ended his plans for world conquest.

He who knows these few facts of the eventful history of Spain and evaluates them correctly has gone a great part of the way to an understanding of the Spanish national character.

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Valor, pride, devotion, as well as individual will to liberty—these are the most prominent characteristics of the Spaniard. Bravery is attested as early as the time of Hannibal and Hasdrubal, when they found the nucleus of their army in Iberia,

and was again and again confirmed two hundred years later by the Roman generals Sertorius and Pompeius. The infiltration of the brave Visigoths served only to emphasize these characteristics of the old Iberians. Uncounted deeds of heroism in Europe, Africa and America have carried throughout all centuries the fame of Spanish bravery. That this bravery oftentimes degenerated into foolhardiness and cruelty is due to the fanaticism to which Spanish enthusiasm and sacrifice may lead. The Inquisition also finds its explanation in this. Whoever is passionately convinced that the salvation of a soul for the true belief is infinitely more important than this corporeal life will easily be deceived into forcing this salvation for eternity, even against the will of the "Unconvinced Sinner".

Pride is so much a part of Spanish character that in Europe the saying "Proud as a Spaniard" has become a proverb. This pride is in no way snobbishness or a sense of the superiority of nobility, but the inborn dignity which characterizes the entire Spanish people. Not to accept presents and not to allow any courtesy or any help to remain unrequited—such is the accepted rule for the poorest as well as for the richest of Spaniards.

The will to personal liberty and independence is perhaps in no other nation so pronounced as with the Spaniard. He is individualist *par excellence*, whereof the political parties could sing a song as well as the trades unions. The Spaniard can ally himself passionately with a person or, better still, with a cause ("una causa" is the motive force of every man) but he does not care for organization, and collectivism is hateful to him. For a period he may suffer the restrictions of discipline, when the *causa* demands it, but fundamentally every Spaniard is a Party by himself, who, only for the sake of a special *causa* unites himself with others.

Such characteristics of the Spaniard, which are intensified by his temperament, explain the fact that in Spain alone the Anarchists did gain any real political importance, while Socialists, Communists and Falangists with their Party-Form and Party-Discipline could not take lasting roots in the Spanish people. The strongly developed regionalism of the Spaniard also goes definitely back to this individualism and to this race pride. Castilians and Aragonians, Catalanians and Basques, Navarrese and Valencians are rooted much more strongly in their own sectional history than is the case with, for instance, the natives of the various sections of France or England.

The picture of the Spanish character would not be complete if it lacked mention of the mystic trait, which makes itself felt in the entire Spanish culture. From Sainte Therese of Avila to Greco and to Miguel de Unamuno this mystic line takes its course. When during the Semana Santa, the Holy Week, processions of masked brotherhoods, with the muffled beating of drums and excitable flourish of trumpets, pass through the streets uninterrupted day and night—when we see hooded men, barefooted, drag heavy crucifixes behind the wagon with the Passion Group, then we feel this spirit of mysticism come to life, the same spirit which cries out at us from the paintings of Goya.

There is a simple way to a clarification of the Spanish character; read *Don Quixote*, the immortal epos of their national poet Miguel de Cervantes. There one finds, in the persons of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, the Spaniard of yesterday, today and tomorrow. It is plain to be seen how strong the contrast is between Don Quixote and, let us say, John Bull or Uncle Sam. Don Quixote has no money sense whatever, and according to his conception, all the achievements of civilization contribute nothing to the development of a true knight. If the Anglo-Saxons, who seek friendships in Central and South America by means of immense dollar credits, would always ask themselves how such offers would appeal to Don Quixote, they would find the correct solution. Sancho Panza, of course, accepts any money offered him, but his better half, Don Quixote, does not let himself be defiled by it. Such combination of "unmodern" qualities explains, perhaps, why in this materialistic and mechanical age, Spain was automatically forced into a back position. This, however, excited their national pride all the more.

Of course, the Spaniard is familiar with the technical advances which have shaped the world during the last one hundred and fifty years, but he does not value them as highly as, for instance, the English, Americans and Germans. His conception of life is not dictated by money, progress, civilizing values, but is governed by honor, love of liberty and the indestructible values of culture.

For the Spaniard, work and the acquisition of money are not ends in themselves, but only means to an end: to a dignified life. This dignified life does not consist in the possession of a bank account, of a large life insurance, for the accumulation of which one sacrifices one's health. For the Spaniard this life of dignity consists in not being at someone's beck and call, in the ability to enjoy God's sun and God's wine as one desires, and

to discuss God and the world with one's friends. *Charlando y discutiendo con sus amigos*, talking and arguing with one's friends—that is a characteristic occupation of the Spaniards of all ranks.

There are few things for which the Spaniard has so little understanding as for the objectivity, the matter-or-factness of the Anglo-Saxon, and especially for the *tempo* of the American. *Manana*—tomorrow, tomorrow, this is the natural defence by which the Spaniards and South Americans oppose "vulgar" insistence. It would be entirely wrong to confuse this standpoint of the Spaniards with ordinary laziness. The Spaniard can be as industrious and effective as anyone. His technical and scientific abilities are hardly behind those of any other race. However, he does not like this manner of life; to him it seems coarse, more fitting for a slave than for a free Spaniard—and finally, with all the money in the world one cannot make the sun more beautiful or drink more wine than one's system can stand. Once this philosophy of life of the Spaniard is understood, then life within the sphere of Spanish culture becomes most attractive and full of interest. In Spain, social life especially is much more varied and intricate than in comparable spheres of Anglo-Saxon culture.

During the years of my life in Anglo-Saxon cultural circles, nothing has astonished me more than, for instance, the uniformity of daily life. This is noticeable no less in the food than in conversation, selection of reading matter and in the judgments concerning the little and big problems of life. Oftentimes I wonder whether this uniformity in everything, in thinking and in acting, of cultured Anglo-Saxons does not explain why, by them only, the democracy of the two-party system could be developed, that system which by so many is now considered the universal solution of all evils. One need only compare with it the political structures of all the Latin-American states, and one is forced to see that, in spite of the overwhelming economic influence of the U.S.A., its political pattern has nowhere been imitated. President Vargas of Brazil is more of an autocrat than Franco of Spain and, if in all these Central and South American republics generals occupy the office of president, there must be a sufficient reason in the national necessity.

Perhaps it is even the limitless individuality of the Spaniard which necessitates the sharper regimentation, while the uniformity and similarity of Anglo-Saxon character permit the looser form of democracy. There is no Spaniard who could imagine that the political life of his country might be reduced to two

parties. The majority of Spaniards would prefer twenty-five million parties: "Every Spaniard his own party".

Here again one comes to understand the great and important influence of the Catholic Church upon Spanish life and culture. Only the existence of a strong, unquestioned philosophy is able to control the untamed spirit, prevent it from losing itself. The security and certainty of his Catholicism means more to the Spaniard than communion with a religious entity. Catholicism gives form to all Spanish life, spiritual, economic and social—entirely independent of the orientation of the individual Spaniard to the Catholic Church.

This finds its strongest expression in the family relations and in economic life. Here the woman's position is the deciding one and, in the Spanish woman, the man's valor is changed to religious faith, her devotion being as strong as his. While it is true, more or less, for all countries, that the wife is the basis for family and nation, it applies to the Spanish woman in particular. She really is the ever steady pole, she is the key to social order in the entire Spanish world, and she obtains her strength primarily from her faith and her devotion.

Often I have had the impression that American women look down upon their sisters in Spanish countries with not a little pity. For the Spanish woman works in her household from early morning till late in the evening; she has no club life, and cannot go out alone of an evening. Even stronger restrictions apply to young girls. They can meet their betrothed even only in the presence of a chaperone. Nevertheless, Spanish women would have no understanding for such pity on the part of their American sisters. They have no desire to work in factories, to live alone or to go out alone in the evening. The young girls prefer to have the boy friend "speak with Papa" as soon as possible. A home of their own, with children of course, that always was, is now and will ever be the desire of every Spanish girl. There are, of course, female factory workers in Madrid and Barcelona, as there is a female proletariat in Mexico and Argentina. These, however, are considered, so to say, "un-Spanish" conditions, regrettable by-products of a degenerate age, objected to and fought against by every Spanish instinct.

The Spanish mother in particular is carrying on this fight, not only to keep her own home together but also to assure such a home to each son and each daughter. Consider the temperament of the Spanish men, the passionate political battles which disrupt so many Spanish families, the demands of an industrial age, and

it will be conceded that it is no easy task. No word of praise for the Spanish wife and mother can be too high. Here again is founded her tenacious loyalty to the Catholic Church. The teachings and practice of the Church aid the Spanish wife and mother in her endeavor, and the Church's philosophy permeates the Spanish conception and way of life completely.

The differences between the Spanish and the Anglo-Saxon "way of life" go deep. Only a knowledge of and respect for these differences can bring that mutual understanding which will be the lasting foundation for peaceful and friendly relations, between individuals as well as between nations.