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SPANISH AND AMERICAN IMAGES

By Julián Marías

WHEN the Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, finished his lecture before an American audience at Aspen, Colorado, in 1949, the great German scholar Ernst Robert Curtius pointed to him and said: "There you have the Mediterranean and a country that ruled the world." The remark is worth keeping in mind when one thinks of Spain. I don't mean, of course, that Spain has preserved any of her former power or that she will regain it in the future. But a country which ruled the world—so few did—must have some features that are not likely to vanish into thin air. Such a country cannot be a nonentity; it should not be ranked among others which "statistically" seem similar in population, output, income, manpower or military strength, but have a quite different background and perhaps are newcomers on the historical stage instead of having had major parts in the making of history.

Many Americans still remember the tremendous impact that the Spanish Civil War had on their lives in 1936–39. For not a few who were then young it was an historical "coming of age;" some felt it as strongly as the subsequent World War in which the United States itself was engaged. In my opinion, this is proof that Spain, even in her decline, still "matters," still is a many-sided reality in the world, at least in the shaping of the Western man's soul.

The Spanish intellectual and literary élite again has proved to be influential in defining the trends of Western culture, despite the obvious fact that the total volume of its achievements lies behind that of Britain, Germany, France or the United States. It is sufficient to cite a few who rank among the great of the twentieth century: Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Juan Ramón Jiménez, García Lorca, Manuel de Falla, Picasso, Miró, Casals—not to mention others who are rated as high as these in Spain but have had less impact or popularity beyond its frontiers, such as Valle-Inclán, Azorín, Baroja, Machade, Menéndez Pidal, Ramón y Cajal. One could hardly draw the profile of the world in which we live without referring to the contribution of these men and—less visible—of others still young who follow the same pattern in new ways and are increasingly influential in their country and in all

Latin America, including Brazil. Most people in the United States are not aware of the fact that the most widely read—and listened to—authors south of the Rio Grande have been and still are writers and thinkers from Spain, whereas nearly all Latin American authors are little known beyond the borders of their own countries.

Finally, Spain as a whole has a subtle influence on political and social developments in all the Spanish-speaking countries of America. On the one hand, very active and powerful minorities are composed of Spaniards (or their descendants) who immigrated many years ago; they belong to their adopted countries, but at the same time look back to Spain, taking from her inspiration, ideas, convictions, feelings, patterns of appreciation and judgment. On the other hand, even native Latin Americans—if one can use this rather inaccurate and misleading expression—have in mind Spain. If she is in good shape, she becomes a positive model; if she is a failure, they lack a powerful stimulant; if she is misled and disoriented, some of this trouble is reflected in the Spanish American republics. It would be rewarding to attempt a study of Spain's unintended influence on the recent history of Spanish America; I imagine it would produce more than one surprise.

From a more general point of view, too, it would be dangerous to ignore what may happen in countries which are not, or which are no longer, great powers. Recent experience shows that most of the troubles in the world come from relatively unimportant countries. The present system is highly complicated and every piece of the machinery has its function; any friction may damage the whole, any maladjustment may in the long run cause the failure of very large enterprises; even a little too much heat at a certain spot may set afire a continent—or the world.

It would be unwise, I think, to ignore what is happening or might happen in Spain.

II

Few truthful words have been written about what has been taking place in Spain during the last 25 years. And in fact it would require a book of uncommon insight and power of analysis to give an intelligible and substantiated outline of Spanish history in that period. I am going to confine myself here to a single point: the changes in the American image of Spain in the last few years and

in the Spanish image of the United States, as the *main* factor in the present and future relations between the two countries.¹

Between 1950 and 1960, mankind has been living—as it usually does—on metaphors. Ours are two, closely connected: “iron curtain,” “cold war.” They constitute the soil on which we stand—precariously. Most things have been altered, modified, at least colored by these powerful metaphors. In consequence, the American image of present-day Spain switched from a “fascist” or “totalitarian” country to an “anti-Communist” one. The next step was easy to foresee, an implication made at first, perhaps, for simplicity’s sake: a member of the “free world.”

The opponents of Spain’s present régime, especially those abroad (émigrés, members of foreign left-wing political parties, etc.) have been accustomed to refer to the situation in Spain as oppression, terror, revolt—a police state. Now when visitors from the United States and Europe go to Spain as tourists, businessmen, students or on special missions they often have the surprise of their lives, because they enter the country freely, travel anywhere, talk to everybody, watch bullfights, sip drinks pleasantly at sidewalk cafés, stroll in the cities and towns, and the result of their experience is a different diagnosis: normality, peacefulness, carelessness, cheerfulness, verbal criticism but no organized opposition, political jokes, little or no fear. The conclusion they easily draw, mainly because their impression is so different from their expectations, is that everything is all right: Spain is a friendly country, an efficient and strongly anti-Communist ally, with even some “organic” democracy, a “free” country, if only somewhat “authoritarian” in view of the impending danger of Communism.

During and immediately after World War II, the Spanish image of the United States included these relevant features: freedom, a high standard of living, opportunities, open-mindedness, hopefulness. The United States seemed to many Spaniards to be a major asset for their future. Then, step by step, disappointment began invading the Spaniard’s soul; or rather, *multiple* disappointments—sometimes conflicting ones, not always or at least not equally justified, perhaps not too logically connected. A part of Spanish opinion expected or feared—according to different interests and

¹ The reader can find a broader approach to this subject in my contribution to the volume “As Others See Us: The United States Through Foreign Eyes,” edited by Franz M. Joseph (Princeton University Press, 1959), and in my book, “Los Estados Unidos en escorzo” (“The United States: a Foreshortening”), available only in Spanish (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1956, 1957).

positions—drastic changes in the political structure of Spain immediately after the collapse of the Axis powers. This first disappointment—or relief—came soon. I would say that the belief in such drastic and “automatic” changes was held by the relatively small number of Spaniards heavily implicated in politics, namely the exiles and those holding office. The vast majority of the people merely expected the beginning of a new period in which their country would move toward adopting the structures prevailing in the Western world, especially among the nations which had defeated Hitler and Mussolini and now were trying to check Stalin’s imperialism.

Then came the second disappointment. It was many-sided. On the one hand, Spain, which needed economic help very badly after the heavy losses of civil war and isolation during the years of the World War, was not included in the Marshall Plan, which was so effective in restoring political as well as economic welfare and balance in all the Western European nations. On the other hand, little was done to induce Spain to join the new organization of the West. The withdrawal of ambassadors, Spain’s exclusion from the United Nations and international agencies, the “quarantine” policy of the late forties—all this could lead only to a “solidification” of the internal Spanish structure, to a fossilization of nearly obsolete principles and slogans; it hurt Spanish pride and gave unexpected strength to the existing state of things. (But not *entirely* unexpected; some Spaniards suspected that behind the “quarantine” policy was a Soviet eagerness to prevent any change in Spain, as the best available tactic at the moment.)

These disappointments, it should be noted, did not refer primarily to the United States, but to the Western nations as a whole. Indeed, I would say that the United States was less involved than most, which is one of the reasons why Spain from 1945 to 1953 or 1954 was a friendly island in the ocean of growing anti-Americanism in Europe. Many Spaniards were sympathetic and still hopeful about the United States. The change came with a third wave of disappointment, mainly connected with American military and economic cooperation with Spain. Except for a few people deeply engaged in politics and committed to extreme positions, most Spaniards welcomed the normalization of Spain’s international position and were hopeful that she would really *join* the Western world. By joining they meant accepting the main standards of public life and personal freedom in the West, even if

some allowance was made for national differences. They received the impression now, however, that no requirements whatsoever had to be fulfilled in order to "join" and begin this coöperation—not even the enforcement of previous Spanish "fundamental laws" concerning civil rights, which, were they really in force, would be a sort of token constitution and would have opened up some possibilities of legal public life, the discussion of important issues and a political evolution along the main lines prevailing in Western Europe and the United States. The impression proved to be largely justified. As might have been expected, the association with the United States failed to influence Spain's main lines of domestic policy in the direction of liberalization or democratization. Indeed, in certain aspects such as intellectual and academic freedom, control of the press, etc., the situation worsened and reached a low in 1956, only partially tidied up later.

It would be a mistake, however, to make these disappointments wholly responsible for the obvious deterioration of the American image in Spanish minds from 1954 on. There have been three other factors in this process. The first was the growth of anti-Americanism both in Western Europe and Latin America. This had little influence on Spain previously, but it was increasingly effective as communication between Spaniards and foreigners became easier and more frequent through tourists, students, books, magazines, newspapers and trips by Spaniards abroad. The second factor was left-wing propaganda, which emphasized Soviet achievements. The third was the official relationship between the United States and Spain and the impression which the public had of it. In my essay in the book, "As Others See Us," I dealt at some length with the first two factors; let us now consider the last one.

III

On the Spanish side, one must remember that the image of the United States and everything related to it relies largely—entirely, for the vast majority of the population—on public sources of information and interpretation, and this means officially controlled sources. These usually speak of "the free world" and "free countries," meaning both the United States and Spain. The unavoidable conclusion is that if this is so, there must be little freedom left in the United States. One often sees in the newspapers, usually under friendly headlines, derogatory comments in which American achievements, morality, culture and way of life are com-

pared unfavorably with those of other countries. The principles which inspire and regulate public life in the United States, as opposed to those prevailing behind the iron curtain, can hardly be expected to be a topic of information and discussion in the Spanish press. The existence of several political parties, elections for most offices, including the highest, open discussion of all issues, political freedom, and of course freedom of the press, separation of church and state (approved by Catholics), freedom of worship, independent labor unions, little state control—these are things that Spanish papers cannot be expected to discuss. For them to give their readers a fair image of the United States would be tantamount to showing that the two systems have little in common and the reader would wonder about the meaning of his choice between the two sides of the curtain.

From the point of view of the United States, I am afraid that the average American is not aware of the implications of apparently harmless attitudes. American officialdom, with few exceptions, seems to take Spanish positions at their face value. It seldom makes clear that "freedom" is not simply "anti-Communism." It does not take proper steps to see that the United States is not presented to the Spanish people in a light and with associations that may suit particular interests but do not increase the appreciation, understanding and sympathy for the United States. It does not make it easy to feel confident in the prospects for a close association with the United States and gives little hope that new possibilities may open in that direction.

IV

If I am not mistaken, possibilities are what matter. I said above that the visitor's impression of Spain, if he is not too biased, is extremely favorable. He finds things perfectly normal; he sees that everyday life is very pleasant, that there is some poverty, but no more than in many other countries, in any case no more than 30 years ago in Spain, and that the average standard of living is better; he sees opportunities for travel, business, writing, publishing. He knows more or less about the political organization of the state; he hears something about pressures and trials, but he may stay for months in Spain without having any immediate evidence of these sad things. On the other hand, he feels certain that all the other possibilities, commodities and pleasures exist.

They do, indeed. The only thing the visitor fails to realize is

that his friend in Spain is not *entitled* to them. He can do many things, but—only as long as he is allowed to. There is an element of what I would call a certain “graciousness,” of “privilege,” about everything that is permitted. In the eyes of the superficial observer this may seem just a subtle nuance, but if the American visitor were to set about comparing this background seriously with his own, he would perhaps be startled. Publications, passports and travel, meetings, lectures, teaching associations—everything *may* be possible, but the possibility is not something that you can rely on. Therefore, you are at a loss when planning, projecting, trying to launch anything, be it business, a review, a society, a spectacle, a discussion group, a trip abroad, a center of research (of course I am referring to activities remote from politics). When public life encounters too many obstacles, it tends, since it cannot be private, to become clandestine. And at the same time, a strange feeling pervades the soul: the closing of the horizon, the freezing of history.

People are slow to lose hope. Not too long ago, most Spaniards were hopeful that the United States, representing the greatest “possibility” in the world at present, would help to warm and melt everything frozen, to set in motion, after the years of war, everything alive, to open the future. Many people—especially among the youth, born to the present situation—are now turning in other directions. Most of them are far from belonging in the extreme positions they seem to adopt, and which they even believe they share. A friend of mine often says when he sees some individual’s unfortunate and insincere change of position: “One more who’s in orbit.” Most of these would like and love the United States if only they had the right image of it, if they could visit it. But they cannot overcome the handicap of misrepresentations; they have no hope left. Paradoxically, the United States appears to be praised and supported now by quite a few of its old (pro-Nazi) opponents and by other people who in fact strongly dislike it; meanwhile, anti-American feeling is growing among the potential real friends of the United States.

The likelihood is that in the near future, if nothing is done to prevent it, a large part of the influential people in Spain will not be friendly to the United States. Yet they could be. The Western defense system, which of course is very important, ranks high among the present issues; but I cannot help thinking that though bases can be very valuable assets if surrounded by a friendly,

willing and reliable country, there is some chance that the future may be subordinated to a precarious present.

What can be done? This is a matter for discussion and reflection. I have wanted mainly to raise a few questions. But the first thing to be done, I think, is to become aware of the problem. The second is to know how to evaluate degrees of importance in Spain. Who, for instance, are the makers of opinion? How do different groups rate? What is the influence of a businessman, a politician, an official, a priest, a scholar, an author? How much are writers read, and how earnestly are they listened to? The third need is to make at least a gesture which would show that Americans really care for liberty and reject *any* crushing of it, from either side. Thus confidence in the United States might be restored among Spaniards, and Spain made a sincere and reliable friend. This, in turn, could perhaps change the present unfair image of the United States in the world as a whole by giving Americans a better and more cheerful reflection in the Spanish mirror.