

“Columbus was actuated by a desire to promote the interests of Romanism, when he traversed an unknown sea and discovered this Western World.”[1]

The above proposition, likely common knowledge in 1888 when it was penned by Justin Dewey Fulton, has been largely forgotten or denied in our day. Today it is common knowledge that Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of America had nothing to do with the totalitarian political theory of the Roman Catholic Church-State and all to do with a particular explorer’s spirit of adventure.

So, as another Columbus Day is upon us, I thought it would be of interest to reprint a portion of the great explorer’s conquests, as retold by Walter Montaña.

In the interest of maintaining Montaña’s detailed and fascinating narrative, I have retyped the entire first chapter of *Behind the Purple Curtain* below titled, ‘Columbus and the Cuban Martyr’, although we would not agree with every point of his interpretation. In endeavoring to reignite Protestant opposition to both Rome’s theology and her political-economic theory, the more relevant and disturbing points I have emboldened for the reader who has not the desire nor the time to read the full chapter. Following this excerpt I will make a few additional comments:

Lonely and solitary, abandoned by everybody, no longer counting on the protection of Queen Isabel, who had furnished the expeditions but had died just before this time, and having spent the rest of his life poor and unnoticed, Columbus, the adventurer who gave dominions and gold to the Crown and the Church of Spain, was agonizing in Valladolid. This was happening on May 20, 1506, four years after his fourth and last expedition in which he reached the coast of Central America.

Was it not enough that his third expedition, which started on May 30, 1498, and took him as far as the northern coast of South America and the great river Orinoco, afflicted him with two years of struggle with enemies in Spain and enemies on the lands he discovered, had resulted in his having been arrested and sent home in chains like a vulgar criminal? Must he also die like a beggar in the street?

Was this his payment for the audacity of discovering the New World with a little fleet of three small caravels, Santa Maria, La Pinta and La Nina, with which he

sailed from Puerto Palos on August 3, 1492, and on the morning of October 12, 1492, landed on what we today call San Salvador?

*What an irony of destiny! When cruising thence southward, coasting Cuba and reaching Haiti, Columbus was cursed by the chief of a tribe who loved liberty more than silver or gold. When he discovered Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and other islands on his second voyage, in 1493, the chief was still there, in his native isle, repeating the curse against Columbus and his crew for having violated the virgin soil. The navigator never knew that the piercing eyes of the Cuban chief, the immortal and brave Hatuey, spying every movement he made, studying every detail of his expedition, counting every action of his greedy men, were going to follow him even to his grave. Those eyes were throwing fires of condemnation to all who dared to put their feet in that sacred territory. Did Hatuey's curse really mean anything against Columbus, following him until his death? The imagination may wonder wildly; the truth is that Columbus' ambition for gold and personal gain were not fulfilled and **his prayers to renew the Crusades for the Church** were not answered.*

If only motives and incentives of the expedition had been nobler and higher!

*'It was the age-old lure of substantial things that sent the pathbreakers of the seas on their perilous journeys—Columbus across the Atlantic in 1492, and da Gama around the Cape to India six years later. Their adventures were only novel incidents in the continuous search for riches' (Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1930, p. 7).*

Edwin Sparks indicates that religious feeling was one of the prime incentives to action in Columbus. If he could discover this outward way to the Indies, he saw himself loaded with riches which he would use in renewing the Crusades. He pledged all the gold he should find to the use of the church and added to his prayer: 'Surely under these conditions God will grant my prayer.' (Edwin Erle Sparks, *The Expansion of the American People*, Scott, Foresman and Co., Chicago, 1900, p. 26).

But could God have answered such a prayer? Was He part of that war of the Crusades? Was He going to approve and bless the bloody Inquisition on whose flames thousands of men, women, and innocent children were going

to perish, once it was established in the New World? No, that cannot be called prayer; it would be an insult to God. That was only the voice of black superstition, which, unfortunately, was destined to cause a deep wound in the heart of the new continent!

*As inducements to enlist men for Columbus' expedition, jails were opened and debtors forgiven. Mutiny was bred in such a crew before a sail was hoisted. But **superstition being their guiding star**, it worked strongly in such minds. That category of human element was the charter for the expeditionary adventure and the mold of conduct, in religion as well as in material conquest, for the New World. It is understood that such a company could not heartily be accepted even by the lowest type of savages and never by a tribe like Hatuey's. Thus the reason for the great chief's curse!*

Columbus went to his grave ignorant of the fact that he had discovered a new world, supposing that he had missed Japan but had landed among the islands of India, and hence called the inhabitants Indians.

*While his body was descending to his grave, the other Spaniards who followed his path toward the lands of gold, **armed with the sword and the cross, were already spotting the soil with the blood of the Indians, culminating their adventure by condemning Chief Hatuey to be burned alive for the crime of opposing the conquest of Catholic missions in his land.** The illustrious Argentinian, Dr. Juan B. Teran, President of the University of Tucuman, reminds us how **Hatuey, bound to the stake, when approached by a Roman Catholic priest to become a Christian, chose the sufferings in hell to avoid a heaven with priests and the company of such 'Christians' as those who were tormenting him and his people on earth.***

Hatuey's life was, no doubt, the life of a great hero. He was still young when the discovery of his beloved island took place, but he lived long enough to see the destruction of his people, the misery to which they were condemned, and even the betrayal of many Indians who sold their bodies to the conquerors for a piece of a broken mirror or the torn remnants of a once colored vestment.

Greater than the physical torture he was prepared to endure was the torment of his soul caused by the ignoble actions of the Spaniards. It was natural then that, bowed

down into the depths of great despair, his great heart was bleeding with a burden. Gradually, without his being able to stem the tide, he had seen many of his beloved people sinking into degradation, imitating the vices of the adventurers. In anguish he lamented the sad condition and planned some way of escape. But how? When he was still a ruler, before the Spaniards came to destroy his dominion, his word, though kindly, was inexorable law. Alas! He realized that now he was no longer heeded by all his people and to the Spaniards he was just another slave!

At this stage, Hatuey was still a splendid specimen of manhood. He was more than seven feet tall. About his mighty shoulders was thrown an enormous blanket, which set forth his towering form to the best advantage. He had a fine forehead; his long black hair fell to his waist; his eyes were full of fire, and his mouth with its thin lips was full of decision. His age was about fifty, and he walked with a firm step. Even his Spanish oppressors envied the good looks of the men of this tribe, as they were the finest developed Indians they had ever seen—instead of the weak, squat figures described by some historians. Both men and women were cast in a noble mould; they were bred true, with no deformed, unhealthy offspring of blood contamination. They were trustworthy, honest, truthful, and singularly faithful in their marital relations.

In the bitterness of his sorrow, Hatuey called into secret consultation two resourceful, faithful braves who remained loyal to him, and with whom he counseled far into the night, as to what might be done to save the remnant of the tribe.

After long and heartfelt deliberations, a decision was reached. Playing an apparently complete surrender to the conquerors, pretending to be resigned to their fate, and making the best of it, they went to the priest to acknowledge their absolute submission to him. In reality, this was only their strategy for the plan of returning to their ancestral haunts and in due time organizing the Indian forces of resistance. No matter how long it would take them to succeed in deceiving the Spaniards, they would do it, using priests as instruments, in the same way they were used by the conquerors to subjugate the Indians.

Once they gained the priests' confidence, a clever idea was planned. With the pretext of going for fish, which abounded there, the Indians hurried toward the forest. Two fleet scouts were sent 'to pursue fish for the padres,' but the fact is that they were given secret instructions as to a desirable location, a supply of water,

proper land for crops, and other needs, where all could go free from the eyes of their tyrants. The men were absent for many days. When they returned they brought abundant fish and pretended to be in high spirits. In the darkness of the night they told their chief the glad news that they had found a beautiful valley where the land was fertile, water abundant for crops, game plentiful, and the scenery the most beautiful they had ever seen.

Hatuey was pleased with the report, and began at once to select the men who would advance toward the new valley. Contacting the loyal tribesmen and their families he made known his plans for the long trek to the 'Promised Land.' The night of escape had arrived. Chief Hatuey, with his mate, Tuzula, and their children, started in the quiet of the hour.

Immediately behind them came the warriors in a wide line to guard against any surprise attack; the women and children marched in the center line, backed by picked braves who were guarding the rear, ready to use their arrows and other weapons in case of pursuit by any traitors of the tribe or the Spaniards. Hatuey knew that in their drunken fury they would attack his party and attempt to drive the people back.

Many miles were traveled on that night, as Hatuey was anxious to reach their destination. They stopped for a few hours of rest in a wooded hill where the dense foliage lured them with its promise of a safe shelter.

Chief Hatuey rose early and upon rounding a craggy hill at the foot of the mesa, the scene which met the brave chief's eyes made his heart thrill with pleasure. Here was a broad vista of waving grasses, with here and there a wooded spot. In the far distance a line of bright green shrubbery bounded a crystal stream.

'Ah, land of heart's desire!' he breathed. To the guides who were with him, the chief related: 'The giant god tore this great peak from his quiver, hurling it at the great green hill. How long ago no man knows! Our fathers' fathers have climbed to the healing waters which bubble from the hot springs, to drink and bathe. My father told me the story that in a fierce battle between two gods, a lightning bolt was hurled to direct our people to the springs.'

A veritable paradise it seemed to the weary and discouraged chief. To the peak of

the craggy hill he climbed, to scan the broad plain, the home of his childhood; the years since he left it at the call of the priests who delivered him to the Spanish conquerors dropped away like a cloak, and he was an Indian again, a rover of the wilds. An air of wild exhilaration filled his soul; the light which had long been absent, shone in his eyes. Smilingly, cheerfully, he spoke to the guides, then shading his eyes from the sun's bright rays, he gave a loud call to his people below, the sign that they were to follow him.

The happy tribesmen were loud in their exclamations of delight, as they climbed the great trees, ran over the rolling hills, and came to rest finally under the green, spreading willows on the edge of the rippling creek.

Then the march was continued. Toward sunset, after a long journey, Hatuey decided to make camp in the little valley the party had come upon. The spot was guarded by smooth, straight, towering trees and covered with wide-leaved foliage; the ground was clear of brush, and a stream of clear water made an ideal place in which to get needed rest and refreshment.

Two fat deer had been speared by the men whom Hatuey had sent ahead. The meat was cut into strips, strung upon long poles, and was soon roasting over the coals of a huge fire. The hungry people were regaled later, enjoying such a feast as they had not eaten for many a day.

With his heart full of content, the chief spoke: 'The Great Spirit, the sun god, is with us, my children. We are at home again in our native habitat. No more shall we reek in the wallow of the white man's sins. We are again children of the wild, where our forefathers dwelt in the ages ago. Here we shall leave them for a time, clearing the ground, planting the seeds, alone and at peace. As for us who are alive, we must prepare the battle now and not rest until these conquerors are driven far far away from our land, and our people become free again.'

Scarcely had Hatuey finished speaking, when they heard a hoarse, hooting war cry, followed by a succession of flying spears. Their enemies had come upon them unawares, dragging themselves along under the cover of the darkness in the clever noiseless manner of the aborigines, which they had not forgotten.

Hatuey and his companions hurled themselves upon their assailants, driving their

spears into the nearest victims. In response to the chief's sharp orders, the other warriors snatched their spears, and rushed toward the jungle, jabbing savagely to right and left. The invaders, in appearance melted away, leaving their wounded, who, although in some cases were frightfully mangled, made absolutely no sound.

The men scoured the brush with lighted torches, and for several hours waited for a further attack. All remained quiet. Soon the women and children, who had been hurried to a place of safety, were gathered together to sleep peacefully for the remainder of the night. The guards, however, remained on the alert, waiting for the early morning, when the march was to be resumed. Five wounded Indians, carried in sergas, blankets of their own weaving, had been treated by the medicine men with yerba de pasmo, which eased them effectually. But when the morning came, they were not able to resume the march!

*In every great and noble enterprise there is always the black hand of some vile traitor. Such was the case with Hatuey's planning. His own blood and race, one who was closer to him than any other person, a second chief, so to say, betrayed him. Guided by that traitor Indian, the Spaniards, fully equipped with force and weapons, **preceded by priests**, were following them. Hatuey and his people, weakened in the attack of the night by Indians, instigated by the Spaniards, were captured. This time **Hatuey, his wife and children, and the other Indian leaders were taken under most severe vigilance. Their hands were tied with heavy ropes, and they were cruelly maltreated on the way to Hatuey's death.***

Hatuey, bound to the stake, was approached by a Roman Catholic padre asking him to accept "religion" in order to enter heaven where "beatitude and rest" are found. But if he refused to accept that religion? His soul would burn for eternities in the fires of hell! Hatuey asked the padre: "If I go to heaven, will I find your Christian people there?"

"Oh, yes, they will be there," the padre answered.

"Then," Hatuey responded, "I will not become 'Christian.' I prefer to suffer in hell rather than go to heaven to be in the company of your 'Christian' people who are so cruel, and so brutal."

The padre and the “Christians” set a fire, and the noble, brave Indian chief of Cuba, the immortal and heroic Hatuey, was burned alive.

So Cuba had its first martyr of liberty in the person of the great Hatuey, not very long after Columbus died. But while the discoverer of the New World passed away without glory, Hatuey kindled the torch of liberty for the whole continent. The Spaniards thought that this was the end of the Indian rebel, that forgotten by time and people, he would not have any place in the annals of history.

Once the chief was killed and the Indians subjugated, the Church proceeded to impart its blessings to the “triumphant conquerors.” Twenty-seven years after Columbus discovered the New World, one stormy morning of 1519, the padre celebrated the first solemn mass in Port of Cuba, having erected an altar under a ceiba tree. He thanked the Virgin and the Saints for giving them, finally, slaves for the conquerors, land and gold for the Crown, dominion for the Church. Reduced to silence—they thought—the Indian rebels would never rise again; land and people were going to be theirs forever. But they forgot that their interest in the New World was merely material, and material things slip away from our hands. Sooner or later, when their plan of exploitation would come to an end and their only objective, gold, would be exhausted, the land and the people would be liberated once more from the hands of the conquerors. “Columbus had found a world for Spain,” says Sparks, “but she was not fit to retain it.”

Cuba has passed four hundred years behind the purple curtain and, contrary to their expectations, Hatuey’s name is remembered and repeated by all Cubans, young and old, as the symbol of martyrdom for human rights. The children in the schools learn today the principles of patriotism in the heroism of Hatuey. And yet we have not seen the depths of infamy . . . the blood left by its martyrs and heroes along the trails upon which Latin America has sought the sunlit heights of liberty.

With regards to Montañaño ‘s last paragraph, bear in mind that he wrote this in 1950. *Liberty* is as foreign a concept to Latin America as is *Protestantism*, and the two go hand in hand. Early twentieth-century historian Felix Rachfahl noted that:

- Protestantism permitted the intellect to be devoted to secular pursuits, not just religious;
- Protestantism brought education to the masses;

- Protestantism did not encourage indolence and distaste and disdain for labor as Roman Catholicism did;
- Protestantism championed independence and individual responsibility;
- Protestantism created a higher type of morality;
- Protestantism fostered the separation of church and state.[2]

The point is that for those of us who are still thankful for our heritage of liberty and Christianity, we should look to God's grace as it manifested itself in the Protestant Reformers. Neither Columbus with his fellow papist conquerors nor Hatuey's "martyrdom" have contributed to, or properly categorized, true biblical freedom. John Robbins comments:

"Martin Luther's courageous rejection—in the name of written revelation, logic, and freedom—of this faith-works religion [Romanism] laid the necessary theological foundation for the emergence of a free, humane, and civilized society from the ancient and medieval paganism of Christendom. The result was religious freedom and her daughters: political, civil, and economic freedom."[3]

Considering early colonial church-state amalgamations in New England, I would go a step further and say such principles of liberty were more thoroughly and consistently fomented with the spread of Baptist ecclesiology and 1689 federalism, driven by the Particular Baptists' understanding of God's two kingdoms.[4]

[1] Fulton, J.D., *Washington in the Lap of Rome*, W. Kellaway, Boston, 1888, p. 55.

[2] Felix Rachfahl, "Kapitalismus und Calvinismus," 1909, as cited in Robbins, J.W., *Christ and Civilization* (2nd ed.), The Trinity Foundation, Unicoi, TN, 2007, pp. 44-45.

[3] Robbins, ref. 2, p. 38.

[4] See the excellent paper by Baines, R., 'Separating God's two kingdoms: Two kingdom theology among New England Baptists in the Early Republic,' *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies*, 2014, pp. 27-68.

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