THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN THE SPANISH RENAISSANCE

I SUSPECT that Professor Camden's kind invitation to me to be one of the speakers of this Conference had its origin in our common interest in the Renaissance woman. It seems appropriate, therefore, for me to speak on the concept of man in Renaissance Spain. Full treatment would require detailed investigation of the related concepts of reason, free will, optimism-pessimism, and others which, if we studied them adequately, would convert this audience into a class and our half-hour into a seminar. I hasten to assure you that I plan nothing so outrageous.

One is struck by the diversity of the ideas on man and his nature, but when our brief survey has been completed, I feel sure that we shall conclude, in words written by Professor Craig nearly a decade ago, that the road to truth followed by these thinkers was not the free use of reason, but reason restricted to the discovery or rediscovery of a universe whose laws were the legacies of a wiser past, or fiat of an unimpeachable God.

God was unimpeachable, and the past was—for the most part—wiser. Sometimes the past was impeached. The past, obviously, had had no inkling of the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries. In 1540 Alejo Venegas declared that only the poles of the earth remained to be discovered, since the Equatorial regions "in our own time have been very adequately traversed by the feet of men." José de Acosta exclaimed in 1591: "Who can fail to believe that the ship Victoria, by circumnavigating the globe, has shown that the earth, no matter how vast, is subject to man, since with his feet he has measured it?"
Yet there is here no Promethean arrogance, nor any Pas-calian awareness of the dwarfing of man by infinity. Man was dwarfed and exalted, but only by the exercise of his free will—dwarfed by the wretchedness of sin, exalted by the glory of its conquest. The one dark note is a certain localized de-terminism—accidental, not substantial—arising from the in-fluences on man's body and mind of horoscope, food, water, and air—a determinism on which the Spaniards, a nation of conquerors, will find it most difficult to make up their minds, as we shall see.

Juan del Encina, one of whose plays was performed in Rome in 1513, called man a worm of a thousand malices, subject to two thousand appetites, a sound carried off by the wind, a building without foundations, yet a creature who held in his hand the reins of his governed or ungoverned impulses. Bernardino de Laredo, the first bishop of Granada, declared man to be a vessel composed of lead (the body) and of brass (the soul infected by original sin); yet a vessel which the Divine Goldsmith has chosen to adorn with gold and silver, enamel and precious stones. St. Thomas of Villanueva, the last Father of the Spanish Church, who died in 1555, apostrophizes man: "Oh man, recognize who you are; recognize your great dignity, in order that your life may match your nature. You are a man; live a human life." Alonso de Orozco, who died in 1591, addresses the sinner: "Oh, sinner: consider the rational nobility that the Creator bestowed upon you. Be not a bastard son; renounce not the glorious nature given you when you were made like unto the angels." Hernando de Zárate, who died after 1596, says that, as a result of the Fall, man may be considered the most miserable animal on earth.

What must man do to rise above this misery? He must live
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like a man, as St. Thomas of Villanueva urged. Already in 1521 Alonso de Madrid has the formula: “Then is man fully in the image of God when he busies himself with knowing and loving the manifestations of His greatness.” Nearly three generations later, in 1596, Alonso López, author of one of the best commentaries on Aristotle’s Poetics produced anywhere in the Renaissance, declared that human happiness consists in the contemplation of the truth. Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, who died in 1658, said in his Epistolario that “so glorious is the end of man, that not only the human means of attaining it are glorious, but the divine sacrifice that made this possible—God’s having become flesh to dwell among us—is the greatest conceivable honor of man, which even the angels could envy.” For Baltasar Gracián, who died in the year (1658) that Nieremberg wrote those words, man is an enigma. The best book in the world, says Gracián, is the world itself. The heavens are an extended parchment, and the stars are letters whose message is easily understood. The difficulty consists in understanding sublunar things, where all is written in cipher and human hearts are inscrutable. There, the best of readers is at a loss.

Whether these writers regard man as worm or angel, as triumphant traverser of the antipodes or as a sealed enigma, they agree on one thing: man’s soul is infinitely precious, and can be saved. His salvation depends on his own free will. Pedro Malón de Chaide in the rather late year of 1588 uses figures of speech employed in Italy a century earlier by Pico della Mirandola in his Oration on the Dignity of Man. At the time of the Creation, he says, God took man, still without individual form or image, and placing him in the midst of the other animals, said to him: “I give you neither fixed abode, nor a face of your own, nor any particular gift. You shall have
a seat of your own choice. The face and the gifts you may prefer, shall be yours. You are bound by no law, by no limit. By your own will—in whose charge I place you—you shall make your law. I have made you neither celestial nor eternal, neither mortal nor immortal; you shall be the determiner and the sculptor of yourself. You can degenerate to lower things or transform yourself into superior and divine things, as it may seem best to you.” Having written this, the author exclaims: “Oh admirable happiness of man, to whom it has been granted to have the fulfillment of his wish.” This in 1588.

With this bird’s-eye view as an introduction, I invite you to examine in detail the doctrine of certain representative men. Let us begin with Raymond Sabunde—he who found a translator and an apologist in Montaigne. He was a Catalan, who died in 1436. The doctrine of his Natural Theology circulates in the Pensées of Pascal, and is one of the main influences on St. Francis de Sales. Its influence in Spain extends through all the sixteenth century. This book is an affirmation of the belief that God is a rational Creator, whose existence is demonstrable from His creation; that man inhabits a rational universe; and that it is man’s privilege, through use of his free will, and the divine gift of grace, to attain to the understanding and the contemplation of the good and the eternal. So excessive is this confidence that the book was, temporarily, placed on the Index.

According to this writer, man is raised above all earthly things by the freedom of his will. He is ennobled by those powers that enable him to recognize his debt of gratitude to God—a debt which he shares with all other creatures and which he must, as their agent, discharge for them as well as for himself. Man’s frame is perfect. God has lifted him from
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degree to degree, to the dignity of God's very image—which is none other than the freedom of his will. Because he bears this image, all creatures serve him; and his own actions should embellish the universe. All of this is a tremendous hymn of optimism. Some fifty years before Pico della Mirandola, Sabunde finds that “among living things, only man is capable of perfecting himself; only he, in his task of self-perfection, cooperates continuously in the stupendous task of creation.”

All men are equal in essence, and here we touch upon the doctrine of the equality of souls, which must concern us later. Men are equal in their freedom and human dignity; in this respect none is more excellent than another. However, accidentally, by the exercise of their own or of other men’s free will, they receive inequality in value and price. Thus extrinsic circumstances engender in man a marvellous diversity. This is the Aristotelian doctrine of natural inferiority, of natural slavery (although, of course, America is yet to be discovered), a doctrine and a problem brilliantly studied by Professor Hanke. Sabunde shows how, in the great chain of being, fibrous rocks are a link upward with the vegetable kingdom; how sensitive plants are a link upward with the animal kingdom; and how intelligent animals are a link upward with mankind. In like manner stupid men, with degraded souls, are a link downward with intelligent animals like the beaver. But I do not wish to end on this unhappy note. America has not yet been discovered. All this is theory. Man, according to our author, is created to praise God in the name of the whole universe. By so doing he saves his soul.

That Sabunde regarded the will as the dominant faculty is patent. Yet his whole system is based on man’s ability to reason his way to a knowledge of God. This is likewise the
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doctrine of St. Thomas, who argues by analogy and design to prove God's existence, but who declares that knowledge through faith surpasses knowledge through demonstration, and goes on to state that in this most excellent knowledge through faith, the Will has the leading place.

Sabunde died in 1436. Juan Luis Vives died 104 years later, in 1540. In his view, all Christian doctrine consists in eliminating the passions and achieving a serenity of spirit which shall expand and rejoice the human heart and make it like unto God and the angels. Man is thus capable of a sort of deification.

Man has three natures. He lives first like a plant; later like an animal; finally, as a man. By purification of passion he may be joined to God and become, in a sense, a god himself. Thus our life is a long progression from matter to sensitive life; therefrom to imagination, creative fancy, and reason, and finally love. Or, it is a degradation, by surrender to the passions, to loss of human qualities. The fact that we can conceive of God proves our immortality; that which understands immortality must itself be immortal. When we achieve such understanding, God recognizes in us a likeness to his Divine Nature and delights therein, more than in the richest temple that hands could erect.

Vives is thus a Christian Humanist. But he too has his dark side. Our intellect is weak. We can comprehend but little in this life, and what we understand is uncertain and obscure. Our minds, imprisoned in the flesh, lie in darkness and ignorance; the edge of the intellect is so dull that it cannot cut even through the surface of things. Great and dark are the secrets of the heart. Yet we must not despair. Since Christ chose to redeem all men, let no one scorn his soul, or risk it, since God, for its redemption, suffered crucifixion.

Julián Mariás has written of Vives: "When he touches on
the immortality of the soul, his pages are enlivened by a strange fire. He expresses, with masterly success, the emotion of the humanist who has investigated all reality, and finds it admirable and worthy of perduration. If Vives did not greatly advance the ontology of the human entity, it is true that in his writings we see human reality portrayed with great vividness by a man who, knowing he must die, would not die completely.” This, says Julián Mariás, is an essential dimension of all anthropology.

We now pass to another generation. In the year of Vives’ death—1540—Alejo Venegas issued a work entitled On the Different Kinds of Books in the Universe. This is a setting forth of what man can derive from his three sources of knowledge: the Book of Nature, which provides our philosophy of the visible world; the Book of Reason, by which we construct our rational philosophies; and the Book of Revelation, the Scriptures, the ultimate source of assurance and authority. These books proliferate into multiplicity, and into them, alas! the devil inserts his own false transcripts.

Venegas is a continuator of Sabunde. One of his chapter headings reads: “Wherein it is shown that man should love God, not only in his own name, but also in the name of all other creatures, whose debt of love is charged to man.” Venegas marvels at men’s negligence. The elements obey the laws of their own perfection, yet man neglects to seek some guide who will declare to him the way he should follow, and its dangers. Venegas finds in man an essential duality: the interior man, all reason; and the exterior man, all sensuality. These engage in open battle, and when the strife is over, one is triumphant, the other in subjection. Philosophy enables wisdom to temper the appetites; reason dominates madness and folly.

Venegas is aware of the pagan concept of Nature as step-
mother, not mother—a concept repeated in our time by Ortega y Gasset, who called man an unfortunate offshoot of the animal kindom, unable to realize his humanity as the horse realizes his equinity. Nature has given the brutes all they need for their perfection. Man has only weakness, ignorance, discontent, insatiability. But the pagans, says Venegas, did not know that man's true home is Heaven. This stepmother-treatment, Venegas relates to Divine Providence. Our hearts are restless till they rest in God. This is a rational argument for the immortality of the soul, which Venegas places alongside the dictates of faith. Man's striving cannot be senseless; it must have a goal; otherwise there would be disorder in the universe.

Venegas' doctrine has also a social aspect. There is a law of compensation operating among the elements. No element exceeds another in mass, but only in density. This may well be pondered by man, in whose society similar compensations are at work. Let not the rich swallow up the poor, who partake in the Redemption no less than the rich. The same may be said of the wise and the ignorant, the slave and the master, the plowman and the king, the sexton and the Pope; even of man and angel, since all are capable of the supreme blessedness.

Fray Luis de Granada had a long life. His first important book was published in 1554; his last in 1588. Two doctoral dissertations have been written on the influence of the devotional works of this Dominican in Protestant England, not to speak of the rest of Europe.

The works of grace, as against those of nature, says Fray Luis, have as their end the deification of man. Fierce and angry men, by the choice of their free will, decide to use the vile part of their natures—which, in accordance with the
idea of the Great Chain of Being, they have in common with the beasts—instead of using the heavenly part, which could join them to the angels. All of man’s dignity consists in two things: reason and free will. It is the passions which dethrone man from his seat of dignity, obscure his reason, and pervert his will.

There appears in Fray Luis a doctrine—the doctrine of natural light—which will assume importance in the quarrel we are approaching—the quarrel as to the responsibility of the American Indians for their sinful and sub-human condition. According to this doctrine, man is possessed of a light whereby, though he may not know the true God, he yet knows the necessity of God and seeks, or should seek, to remedy his weakness. Fray Luis repeats, as his predecessors had done, the injunction that man must assume responsibility for passing upward, along the ladder of Being, the expressions of praise from the lower creatures, whose voices otherwise would be silent. Fray Luis knows how badly man does this. And he knows that man is beset by endless miseries. These, he asserts, are inherent in nature, because of the sin in Eden. Yet man can always rise above nature—sobrenaturalizarse—by the gift of heavenly grace. Even Aristotle, he reminds us, saw in man something of divinity. Especially in Fray Luis’s later works there is a glowing optimism: Man, the microcosm, is nature’s crowning glory. And this note of glory is stressed, in the year 1588, contrary to what might be expected in the passage from Renaissance light to what is commonly spoken of as Baroque confusion and bitterness.

The long life of Fray Luis de Granada has caused us to get ahead of our story. We must go back to 1575, the year of publication of Juan Huarte’s Examen de Ingenios, analyzed at length by Professor Craig in *The Enchanted Glass*. The
book is based on the differential psychology of the bodily humors, which in turn correspond to the four elements, whose mixture in the human body is ever in precarious balance, or in outright imbalance. Huarte sets out to explain individual differences. Man's habitat, his food, his drink, the air he breathes, the influence of the stars at his birth, cause alterations in his organism. All men are therefore more or less ill—distempered, Huarte would say—but never in exactly the same way. All this had its origin in the sin in Eden, which drove man from Paradise, depriving him of the fruit of the tree of life. In such sad circumstances, Cain was engendered. Through Adam's descendants this ill health and disorder were transmitted to modern man. At this point there enters an element of paradox. All is not lost. Plato had said that geniuses are half mad. Perfectly adjusted individuals, says Huarte, lacking the beneficent element of illness, are inevitably mediocre. Indeed, from man's essential illness, Huarte derives consoling doctrine: no man, no matter how great his rudeness, is without some special aptitude. At the same time, there is determinism: food, air, water, environment, horoscope, make the fool or the wise man: natura facit habilem. There is also here a certain noble pride: fallen creature though he be, man has made progress and is capable of making much more. If only Huarte could enter the schools and conduct his tests, how he would change students from one career to another, how many he would send back to the fields; and how many he would rescue from a life of toil and set to developing their true bent—letters! Huarte believes in the equality of all souls, and he makes the brain the seat of the soul, since it is the organ of the psychic faculties. His book had tremendous influence. The very structure of Cervantes' Don Quixote is based upon it.
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Shortly after the publication of Huarte's book, Francisco Sánchez published his *Quod Nihil Scitur*, a work of skepticism which prepared the way for the methodical doubt of Descartes. How can man know anything, Sánchez asks, when he cannot know himself? What an astounding variety in the single species of mankind! Some are pygmies, some giants; some totally naked, others hairy or clad in skins; some speechless, some tree-dwellers. Some are cannibals; some hold wives and children in common; some have no home. Others, for religion, will suffer martyrdom. Yet others flee death at all costs. Some, after death, are buried or burned with live companions. Others receive no burial. You may refuse, he says, to grant that all of these are men. He will not argue the case. He follows reputable accounts, he says, both ancient and modern. None of these things seems to him impossible. What is more: there may be corners of the world where even stranger things have been, are, or shall be. How, then, can man possibly know himself, let alone the universe in which his lot is cast?

This insistence on diversity invites us to go back some fifty years and examine the doctrine of natural inferiority and natural slavery which harrassed the makers of Spain's colonial policy and sorely troubled her in her struggle for justice, or justification, in the conquest of America. This has been most adequately studied by Professor Hanke in his recent book on racial prejudice in the New World.

The Spaniards, to a remarkable degree, felt the need of theological justification for their acts of expansion, for Spain was, in a very real sense, a theocracy, with theology as the party line. The idea that there were natural-born hewers of wood and diggers of mines appealed to a nation of Conquistadores. As early as 1519 a first application of Aristotle's doc-
trine of natural inferiority was made. And in those same early years the Indians were passionately defended by Father Las Casas, who like Fray Luis de Granada, was to have a long life and influence Spanish thought over many years. The debate was fierce around 1550, as Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, Spain's great Aristotelian, argued the case for a policy of subjugation and forceful conversion. So successful was Sepúlveda in this that the historian López de Gómara did not bother to present the arguments, and merely referred to Sepúlveda's Latin writings. Others called the idea pure tyranny. The Spanish crown inclined, officially, away from Aristotle and Sepúlveda, and decreed peaceful persuasion as a means of converting the Indians. The government of Mexico City even suggested that there be always six Indians on its Council. In 1573 a basic law was promulgated, an eclectic sort of thing, based largely on the ideas of the Apostle to the Indians, but taking into account the interests of the crown and the general usefulness of applying, in some measure, the Aristotelian idea.

Law or no law, the debate went on. In practice there were the greatest difficulties. Some claimed the Indians, inferior creatures, could only be coerced. In spite of all theories, there developed an abyss between conquerors and conquered. Yet to Spain's honor be it said, that no other colonial power took so vehemently to heart the problem of the ideal just treatment to be meted out to its subject peoples.

I wish to quote yet another text of the sixteenth century: Friar Juan de Pineda's *Christian Agriculture*, of 1589. It shows the religious and philosophical thinking that made it possible to regard the Indians as worse than benighted—as wilfully and deterministically inferior and guilty. This Franciscan author quotes St. Paul to the effect that the Gentiles—peoples who have never received a law for living the good
life—have, nevertheless, a natural light, or natural law, which
dictates what is sufficient for salvation. Their synderesis, says
the friar, that is, their inborn inclination to embrace the
good, either excuses them or condemns them, according as
they have chosen or failed to follow their inner light, to re-

dpond to that higher law. He says in another place that there
are men of such powerful inner chemistry, that though nour-
ished on cheese and garlic, they can purify this grossness and
become men of lofty intelligence. On the other hand, there
are sons of nobles who, though fed on delicate viands, live
bestially, because of an evil admixture of the elements in
their bodies. This baseness they pass on to their offspring.
Hence certain families and races normally produce persons
of good endowment; others, with equal normality, are ill dis-
posed, malicious, lustful, incapable of good. None of this, to
be sure, has to do with essence. It is a question of exterior
accidents. Like the stars, these other influences may incline
to evil, but free will, and the natural light, are always there,
and should be heeded, or guilt ensues.

As we pass into the seventeenth century, there is less con-
cern, in literary works, about the Indians, about inferior
races, and natural slavery. As Spain’s star wanes, there is a
greater awareness of life’s precariousness, its brevity, its es-

t
sential inability to satisfy man’s longings. Many have spoken,
for example, of Quevedo’s anthropological pessimism. What
man is this?, asks Dámaso Alonso in a recent book. What did
he believe? When one reads him in his entirety, one can an-
swer: Quevedo believed that if the cradle is but the prefigur-
ing of the grave, so the grave is the prefiguring of life eternal.
No pessimist could regard man’s emergence from nothing-

ness into life as a “reward given in advance,” a prize already
received, a foretaste of divine glory. Quevedo says, in the
words of St. Augustine, that we should give thanks to God
for our punishments as well as for our blessings, that we should sing the *Te Deum* for our losses and defeats, no less than for our victories.

In Calderón, life is spoken of as a dream. Man's days are as grass. He ploughs in the sea and writes in the wind. Yet all the doctrine of the Christian Epic—the Fall, the struggle, the Redemption, the deification—all of it is clearly set forth in his dramas and *autos sacramentales*. Cervantes' hero, on his deathbed, sees the scales drop from his eyes. Truth is revealed, and he dies giving thanks to God. Gracián's essential Christianity is unquestionable.

And so we come to the end of our survey. We are no nearer to modern philosophy than when we began. But we have seen into the heart and into the life of a nation—a nation that ardently believed in human, and in superhuman, values. We have found, with Professor Roland H. Bainton, that the contrast of Renaissance thinkers with those of the Middle Ages, in the matter of the concept of man, is not pronounced. That man has the power to fall to the level of the brute, or to mount the ladder of ascents and to enjoy the vision of God, is an old and recurrent theme, from the early Greek theologians to the Dominican and Franciscan mystics in the very age of the Renaissance. Although in other countries of Renaissance Europe the Christian epic of creation, fall, and redemption plays a diminished role, this is not so in Spain. In Spain there is no tendency to pass from Christianity to universal religion. Calderón is the end-product of a Catholic culture, preserved in essential purity. Perhaps for that reason it seems incredible that he was a contemporary of Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, a partial contemporary of John Locke and Gottfried Leibnitz.

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