

Dear all, greetings.

The role of the papacy as the global arbiter among warring faiths and nations is nothing new....and has been seen many times before, not least in the story of Christopher Columbus and the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella.

When Ferdinand and Isabella were born in the mid 1400s, modern-day Spain was divided among several warring and competing kingdoms and principalities: Aragon; Navarre; Castille; Andalucia; and the Moorish kingdom of the deep south. There was no guarantee that the Iberian peninsula would be ever united, although every “Christian” king on the Iberian peninsula considered it his holy duty to eliminate the Moorish kingdom of the south. The “re-conquest” of Spain had been going on for 450 years before Ferdinand and Isabella came along, but it was one of the dominant features of Spanish politics through much of the Middle Ages. The re-conquest also lent itself to political claims for political unity and political unification in the “Christian” north of Spain vs the Moors of the south.

When Isabella and Ferdinand married, it was both a love match and a political match. There was a “pre-nuptial” agreement which ensured that Isabella would remain the dominant partner to the joining of the royal houses of Aragon and Castille, although this was often ignored in practice. Spain had been wracked by constant warfare between competing nobles, and also along its borders with the Portuguese and the Moors. When Ferdinand and Isabella came together, their first focus was how to unify all of Spain. The impetus was not merely political – it was spiritual. There was much apocalyptic preaching and imagery, particularly in the popular imagination, and many viewed the end of the world as being nigh. In both Italy and Spain, the books of Daniel and Revelation provided much fodder for apocalyptic preaching. For Ferdinand and Isabella, both devout Catholics, the unification of Spain was viewed as being an eschatological necessity to prepare the land for the judgments of the end of the world. Of the two, Ferdinand was more politically cunning and driven by dreams of military glory, but Isabella was the more pious and devout. She consciously modelled herself after the woman of Revelation 12. She was the incarnation of the Virgin, the final pure woman of Revelation 12, and the bringer of the “time of the end” of Daniel 11 and 12.

Certain strategies were adopted to prepare Spain for the apocalypse.

First, the re-conquest of the Iberian peninsula and elimination of the accursed and infidel Moors was stepped up. The Moors were divided among competing kings, and Ferdinand skillfully played the various Moorish parties off against each other. Year after year, Christian armies invaded and laid waste to Moorish cities, destroying ancient fortresses with the imported cannon (“bombards”) from Italy and Germany, together with their mercenary engineers. Eventually, the kingdom of the Moors was destroyed, and the locus of Muslim might in the Mediterranean basin switched from southern Spain to the Ottomans in the eastern Med.

Second, the Inquisition was started. Ostensibly this was for the purification of the realm, eliminating heretics. The rules of the Inquisition were a complete travesty of justice, with the accused not being able to know who their accusers were, the evidence against them, and in some cases even the charges. The Edict of Mercy gave an accused person 30 days to come forward and confess to the unknown. If this did not happen, or their evidence was not judged sufficient, they were threatened with torture, and then tortured, either on the rack or by water-boarding. On the rack, muscles were ripped apart and bones cracked apart. Few survived. Almost all the victims had their land and property confiscated by the State, with the Inquisitors themselves receiving a substantial % of the takings. Greed mingled with false piety.

Indiscriminate terror, fear and loathing swept the nation. Old enmities were settled with anonymous accusations to the Inquisition. Some inquisitors were poisoned or hacked to death, such was the hatred many felt towards them. One such murdered inquisitor, Pedro Arbues, Inquisitor of Aragon, was later beatified and turned into a "saint" by a later pope. This particular mass murderer is still prayed to daily by many Catholics. Funds poured into the royal coffers and the Church's coffers. Many targets were "conversos," i.e. those of Jewish ancestry who had converted to Catholicism, or who had been forced to convert. They were accused of reverting to Judaism in secret, and most were killed. As the Inquisition's "men of God" did not spill blood, their victims were water-boarded or stretched on the rack. To be tortured was to "Put the question." No blood was spilt, technically speaking. As all condemned heretics were bound for eternal hell-fire, they were ushered into the eternal hereafter by being burnt at the pyre....another bloodless way of execution. The process was called being "relaxed" by the Church, one of many horrifying euphemisms employed by the Inquisition. For those who confessed their sins, the Church in her mercy allowed the victims to be strangled to death on the platform before being burnt at the pyre. Justice was routinely denied in the Inquisition. Torture was the norm. Fear, widespread terror and mutual suspicion spread throughout society. Nobody was safe. Thousands of innocents were burned alive, strangled or tortured to death. Many fled to other countries and lost everything in the process. The coffers of Ferdinand and Isabella swelled with the proceeds of confiscated lands and properties, which in turn financed the wars with the Moors. It was over 2 centuries before the bitter fires of the Inquisition eventually burned out.

Third, anti-semitism was fanned. The inquisitors first turned to the social destruction of "conversos," but then engineered one of the worst ever "fake news" stories to justify a national assault on the Jews of Spain. The Sephardic Jews were the descendants of Judean princes and nobles who had lived in Spain for almost 1500 years, and they had blessed the national history with philosophers, physicians, scientists, writers and business acumen. Such social and intellectual prowess had brought envy and hatred. Conversos were Jews who had converted to the Catholic faith over the proceeding centuries, either voluntarily or involuntarily. When a certain Garcia, a converso, went on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in NW Spain, he got drunk one night at an inn he was staying at on his journey, and out of his knapsack fell some wafer. His drinking companions saw this, and dragged him off to a local ambitious priest, who immediately saw the opportunity for personal advancement. The poor man was brutally tortured for five days, bravely telling the truth – that he was not taking part in Jewish rituals, but to no avail. The greed and ambition of the inquisitor was not to be held back by the mere truth! Eventually, his body broken, he confessed to having lapsed into some Jewish rituals and being part of a plot to ensure all Spanish Christians would die and their property taken by Jews. Others were accused, and the circle of suspicion grew. Eventually, the charge was made that a circle of Jews had stolen and murdered a Christian boy in a ritual murder that mocked the Crucifixion. Murder. Heresy. Poison. Blood. Superstition. The destruction of Christianity. The arrival of Satan himself. Nobody could find a grieving mother, but the tale of the Holy Innocent of La Guardia was spread by the inquisitors across the nation. The case against Garcia was so weak and shaky that the local inquisitors had to warn the local population not to speak of the case – it was settled, and that was that! This entire fabrication ("fake news") suited the inquisitors well, and at the end of the day, partly in order to allay the unfounded yet eagerly whipped up public concerns about Jews stealing and killing Christian children, a royal order was issued, expelling all the Jews from Spain in 1492 with a few months' notice. Many Jews "converted" to the Catholic faith, where they would remain under the suspicious eye of the Inquisition as conversos. Most however fled around the Mediterranean basin. About half fled to Portugal, where they were taxed on leaving Spain, and had to pay an entrance tax into Portugal. Some fled to N. Africa, others to Italy and elsewhere. As they left, great commercial centers and ports such as Barcelona were stripped of their middle class, their entrepreneurs, their bankers, their skilled artisans, and suffered the terrible economic

consequences as a result, much as France still suffers today from the expulsion of the Protestant Huguenots in the 1600s.

Throughout these 3 parallel strands of history: Christian and Muslim warfare leading to the destruction of the Moorish kingdom; the terror of the Inquisition; and the persecution and then the expulsion of the Jews, the Spanish state grew in strength. It was unified. It was wealthy. It combined state and church in a fearsome machine of oppression. It also grew in its sense of Messianic fervor, identifying themes in Daniel and Revelation that fed the national sense of the need for Spain to be purified of heretics, infidels and Jews before the Apocalypse arrived....and also of expanding the reach of the Church. Local “prophecies” indicated that whoever pushed the Moors out of Spain would lead the final charge to free the Holy Land from infidel control and establish the New Jerusalem.

This last impulse was fulfilled in the life and adventures of Christopher Columbus. An Italian adventurer, he pushed and lobbied for many years at the court of Portugal and of Spain for royal sponsorship to sail west and find a short sea passage to India. The Portuguese had explored down the coast of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, and all the way across to India. Although a small nation, Portugal was developing a world-wide trading and colonial empire. Their sailors had also inadvertently landed in Brazil as they attempted to avoid the storms of the S Atlantic. After much lobbying – a long story in itself, Columbus was commissioned to sail with 3 caravels west and to claim the land for Spain. His lobbying played on the messianic hopes of Ferdinand and Isabella, a new Spain, the New Jerusalem, the New World, all led by the glorious and most Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. Truly, they were preparing the world for the eschatological crisis. It was hoped that he would sail west and find Japan / China / India, thus avoiding the long route around S Africa. Columbus did in fact sail west, and “discovered” modern-day Cuba in the first of his multiple voyages. He would eventually “discover” much of the Caribbean and the central American lands. He brought back gold, slaves, tobacco, potato, corn and syphilis, which caught on and killed multitudes in various Iberian cities. In turn, he brought a wide-variety of diseases to the Caribbean that rapidly killed off entire populations.

The world in the 1490s was eerily similar to our world today. Christians and Muslims were busy killing each other. Nations were dividing against each other on religious / cultural grounds. The alleged “clash of civilizations” of today was reality back then. Anti-semitism was virulent and violent across much of Europe. Political corruption and cynical manipulation was rampant. Modern communications had been transformed by the invention of printing, and different monarchs were printing their own versions of events and disseminating these via the printing presses. Political propaganda was increasingly the norm, including deliberate “fake news” used to whip up racial hatred on the part of the Inquisition. It was an era of rapid technological progress and social exploration – better known as the Renaissance. Humanism and secularism were on the rise, particularly among the scholarly elites. Jewish refugees were moving from country to country across Europe, as were refugees from the Muslim wars in the Balkans. Individual states such as Portugal, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire were dreaming of crusades, conquests and conversions on a global scale. Tensions were high with the Ottomans in Turkey over refugees and the destruction of the Moors of Spain. Portugal “assumed” the rights to own Africa, India and Brazil. With the latest maps and sailing and printing technology, the world was rapidly shrinking into a global village.

And where did the pope come in? Ferdinand and Isabella were desperate to protect their discoveries in the New World. In such a divided world as was in the 1490s, who could be the world’s mediator? Who alone could arbitrate between the nations and faiths of the world? Who had the wisdom to manage and be the final judge in the then rapidly changing world? The answer was the pope, even as dissolute,

corrupt, immoral, and venal a prince as Alexander VI, the first of the infamous Borgias to wear the papal tiara. And judge he did. He issued 2 papal bulls in 1493, giving everything discovered east of a line in the mid-Atlantic to Portugal, and everything west to Spain. Yes, the pope simply divided the world in 2 and gave the rights to exploration, conquest and colonization and Catholic outreach to the 2 leading sea-faring and Catholic nations of the day, Portugal and Spain. And on what basis did the Pope presume to have this authority? As the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, the pope had alleged dominion over the souls of all men and women and children on earth, and therefore only he could decide who and what nation would conduct the bringing of the Good News to the LORD's separated children, i.e. the lost. With these important papal bulls in hand, Columbus sailed on his 2nd voyage from Spain on 25th Sept 1494, intent officially on bringing all the souls of the Americas into the tender embrace of the Catholic Church, and if some gold, tobacco or slaves were to be gained in the process, that was an added fortuitous benefit.

And how does this relate to Pope Francis? As many have noticed, our world seems to be steadily fraying at the edges politically, spiritually, morally and economically. We are also living in a global village, with mass media ensuring that single events or speeches or actions are known worldwide. As in the era of Ferdinand and Isabella, today we see conflicts between Christians, Muslims and Jews. Anti-semitism is on the rise. Fake news is everywhere. Large corporations divide the world at will. Torture and trafficking in human bodies abound globally. New technologies are changing and shrinking the world. Commercial forces are overwhelming democratic voices. Greed and ambition abound, as does lawlessness and a scant regard for basic human rights. In this milieu of moral and social decay, we should not be surprised to see the papacy pushing for global recognition and a global role, as per the prophecies of Revelation 13, and that is exactly what the papacy is doing.

To commemorate the 5th anniversary of Pope Francis, the Vatican is releasing a movie in mid-May 2018 in the USA entitled, "Pope Francis – a Man of His Word." The trailer can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUKlxzC8MIg>. In our fragmented and polarized world, this movie can easily be seen as a play by the pope to be seen as the moral authority for humanity and a leader whom humanity can rally around, over and beyond any national leaders. He is the alleged balm for our fractious political polarization. The great uniter around our common humanity. This upcoming movie is only a small part in the recovery from the deadly wound of 1798AD to a position of global dominance and leadership. Once again, as Revelation 13 reveals, the papacy will seek to enforce its will on the nations of the world via the Mark of the Beast imposed through a union of Church and State as happened in the Inquisition, and once again, as in the time of Columbus, persecution, imprisonment and the death penalty will be the order of the day for those who will deviate from its authority.

Now indeed is a time for prayer and reflection on our own walk with God, how deep and committed it is, and to pray not that those who are faithful to God can avoid the impending storm, but that God might give us the grace to endure it.....to the very end.

Have a blessed Sabbath!

Conrad.