

# Steer, Courageous Sailor!

One indication of the cultural decline of our times is the degree to which Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Americas has become the object of a campaign of "politically correct" vilification directed ultimately at Christian civilization itself. Typical of this campaign are the comments of Hans Koning: "The year 1492 opened an era of genocide, cruelty and slavery. . . . What sets the West apart is its persistence, its capacity to stop at *nothing*. No other race or religion or non-religion ever quite matched the Christian West. . . . Columbus was but one frightening example of the corruption of unchecked power. . . . It is almost obscene to celebrate Columbus, because it is an unmitigated record of horror."

Contrast this anti-historical diatribe with the view expressed one hundred years ago by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *On the Columbus Quadricentennial*: "By his toil, another world emerged from the unsearched bosom of the ocean: hundreds of thousands of mortals have, from a state of blindness, been raised to the common level of the human race, reclaimed from savagery to gentleness and humanity; and, greatest of all, by the acquisition of those blessings of which Jesus Christ is the author, they have been recalled from destruction to eternal life."

As we shall demonstrate in this issue of *Fidelio*, contrary to those who denounce Christopher Columbus as a mass-murderer and reject European civilization as imperialistic, Columbus' exploit, which was inspired by his Christian faith, liberated the peoples of the New World from a barbarous state and extended to them the benefits of the Renaissance civilization of Europe.

To fully understand the significance of Columbus' 1492 voyage, it must be located in the context of the Council of Florence of 1439. At that council the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Churches were briefly reunited for the first time in nearly four hundred years, based on acceptance of the Western belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father,

but also from the Son. This concept, which is known in Latin as the *Filioque* ("and from the Son"), implies that all men are in the living image of God (*imago viva Dei*), and are capable, through the imitation of Christ, of participating in God (*capax Dei*). Moreover, since the Holy Spirit is Love, and the Son is the Word, man is called to works of charity based on reason.

The voyage of Columbus, which required advanced scientific knowledge of the laws of the physical universe, and which was motivated by a desire to bring salvation to mankind through evangelization, was thus a reflection of the *Filioque* concept affirmed at the Council of Florence.

Since at least the days of

Raymond Lull in the thirteenth century, leading circles in the Christian West understood that it was strategically necessary to outflank the stranglehold which the Ottoman Empire held over the Eastern Mediterranean, by developing a new route to the Orient. When the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, the necessity of a strategic flank became even more imperative. Both the Portuguese effort to circumnavigate Africa as well as Columbus' attempt to reach the East by traveling due west, were thus a direct outgrowth of the strategic concerns which dominated the Florentine Council. And, as we show, Columbus received crucial scientific support for his endeavor from Paolo dal Posso Toscanelli, a close collaborator of Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, one of the key organizers of the Council.

Although not all Europeans who came to the New World lived up to the conception of man expressed at the Council of Florence, it is an undeniable fact that the Church made continuing efforts to do so, and that the abuses against the native populations, rather than being an expression of European Christendom, were the result of a contrary, anti-Christian orientation. Two immediate examples of the approach of the Church come to mind: First, Pope Eugene IV, who was Pope at the time of the Council of Florence, issued the first papal Bull condemning slavery. Second, Pope Paul III issued a Bull in 1537 which affirmed that

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the native populations of the Americas could receive the sacraments because they, like the Europeans, *possessed reason*.

The concept of natural law underlying the Church's evangelization policy is expressed most clearly by Nicolaus of Cusa in his book *The Catholic Concordance*. In this work, written in 1433, Cusa developed the revolutionary thesis that, since by nature all men are created equal in power and freedom, and are endowed by God with reason, all legitimate governance can only come from the consent of the people and not from any coercive law or judgment contrary to reason.

Contrast this concept of humanity with that which prevailed in the New World at the time of its discovery by Columbus. As is amply documented in the article entitled "Who Really Killed the Aztecs?," the Aztec Empire was a cannibalistic slavocracy, an inherently self-destructive society.

Any honest reading of history, therefore, would have to conclude, based on the scientific concept of *potential relative population-density*, that it was Christian civilization which saved the indigenous peoples from extinction. Rather than respecting and developing all human beings as in the living image of God, the Aztecs sacrificed them to a plethora of gods in whose names they cut out their hearts, drank their blood, and ate their arms and thighs.

Contrary to the cultural relativists, who idolize such bestiality and denigrate Western culture as racist, Nora Hamerman demonstrates in her article on the Council of Florence, that the superior humanity of Western culture is nowhere better evidenced than in the great works of art which it produced during the Golden Renaissance, whose purpose was to elevate the mind of the viewer into harmony with the will of his Creator, thus freeing him to continue God's work by improving man's mastery over the rest of Creation. For as Lyndon LaRouche explains in "The

## Columbus

Steer, courageous sailor! Although the wit may deride you,  
And the skipper at th' helm lower his indolent hand—  
Ever, ever to th' West! There *must* the coast be appearing,  
Yet she lies clearly and lies shimm'ring before your mind's eye.  
Trust in the guiding God and follow the silent ocean,  
Were she not yet, she'd rise now from the billows aloft.  
Genius stands with Nature in everlasting union,  
What is promised by one, surely the other fulfils.

—Friedrich Schiller

Classical Idea: Natural and Artistic Beauty," in contrast to the Romantic or Modernist approach to art based on *eros*, the Classical approach of Christian humanist art is based on the love of God and mankind. Its purpose is "to bring forth the force of *agapē* to rule our minds and guide our actions."

In this year of the quincentennial of Columbus' voyage to the New World, civilization is again in need of a strategy for outflanking the enemies of mankind.

As Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche stressed in a speech delivered on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the Council of Florence, the primary task before us today is to realize *in our own time* the objective which motivated Columbus, the salvation of the human species based upon the concept of man elaborated at the Council.

It is our duty, following in the footsteps of Columbus, to contribute to the development of the peoples of the world and to free our fellow men from the barbarous state in which so many are still consigned to live today. And just as the discovery of the New World was the leading edge of the development of humanity in the fifteenth century, so we see in today's exploration and future colonization of space, the necessary means for mankind to lift itself above the earthly concerns of this our mortal life. It is with this spirit that we join Friedrich Schiller in his exhortation to the potential Columbuses on every continent: "Steer, courageous sailor!"