

# The Controversial Historical Image of Columbus from the Sixteenth-Century to Modern Times

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The intrinsic image of Columbus as a prominent figure in history has changed dramatically from the sixteenth-century to modern times. During his lifetime, Columbus like any prominent figure in a position of leadership had his enemies and detractors who painted a decidedly biased and unfriendly picture of his character and accomplishments. But the vast majority of astute, knowledgeable, and informed contemporaries pictured him as a heroic genius in his seafaring and navigational accomplishments, and a devout Christian who applied the highest moral standards to himself and to the goal and implementation of his epic 1492 Enterprise of the Indies.<sup>1</sup> This image of Columbus as a heroic, virtuous, and nearly divine figure<sup>2</sup> extended from the sixteenth-century well into the twentieth century. Late in the twentieth century this favorable image of Columbus changed significantly in academic and popular writing to picture Columbus as a shallow entrepreneur and the underlying purpose of his 1492 voyage was to obtain slaves and gold for his own aggrandizement of wealth and prestige.

The most prominent contemporary writers who gave biographical details concerning Columbus were; Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire d'Anghiera) (McNutt 1970); Andres Bernaldez (Farina-Triolo 1992); Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (Oviedo 1959); Columbus' son Ferdinand Colon (Keen 1959); and Bartolome de Las Casas (Las Casas 1951, 1971). The writings of Peter Martyr and Andres Bernaldez primarily covered the navigational and geographical details of the voyage and the brief references to Columbus the man were all favorable regarding his impeccable moral standards and humane treatment of the Indians. Oviedo's writings at times showed a strong Nationalistic bias because Columbus was an Italian immigrant rather than a native Spaniard, but he never doubted Columbus' strong belief that his primary goal was conversion of the Indians to Christianity and places no blame on Columbus for mistreatment of the Indians. The biography by Columbus' son, Ferdinand was also favorable, but at the same time understandably biased, so historians have given it little credibility.<sup>3</sup>

Bartolome de Las Casas was intimately associated with Columbus and his sons, Ferdinand and Diego, for a long period of time. Las Casas was an astute and candid observer and certainly can be considered completely unbiased, since he was quick to condemn other contemporary Spaniards for the same immoral and inhuman acts that are now attributed to Columbus. In his *Historia de las Indias* Las Casas (1951) gave a detailed description of the physical appearance and personality of Columbus, then had this to say: "In matters of the Christian religion without doubt he was a Catholic [true believer] of great devotion. He was extraordinarily zealous for the Divine Service; he desired and was eager for the conversion of these people [the Indians], and that in every region the faith of Jesus Christ be planted and enhanced." This evangelical missionary zeal of Columbus to bring Christianity to the New World, expressed many times in his journal of the voyage,<sup>4</sup> was brought to the fore when he modified his signature from the Spanish Cristobal Colon to the Graeco-Latin, *Xpo Ferens*, which means Christ Bearer.

Columbus strongly believed he had a Divine mission to bring Christianity to the New World with his Enterprise of the Indies, *and this fact was not questioned by Church leaders or historians of the time!* Much of Columbus' intense evangelical missionary zeal may well have come from or been strengthened by his close association with the Franciscan friar Antonio de Marchena.<sup>5</sup> The Franciscan mendicant order founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209 took more interest in discovery of new lands to spread the faith than any other branch of the Church. Franciscan monks preceded Marco Polo into the Far East and China and established missions which flourished in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But all of this came to an end with the conquests of Tamerlane and the expansion of Islam in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century when the land route to the Far East was cut off.<sup>6</sup>

Marchena would have been familiar with this history of the Franciscan missions to the Far East so it follows that he would be vitally interested in a project that would help the Franciscans and the Church regain its toehold in that area of the world. Marchena was both a man of God and a learned cosmographer, so he could easily see that Columbus was just the man to carry Christianity back to the Far East (the Indies) by a sea route to bypass the blockade of Islam. For this reason Fray Marchena steadfastly supported Columbus from the first meeting in La Rabida through his lengthy petition before the Spanish court (Taviani 1985:433-440). Marchena was respected and admired by both Ferdinand and Isabela so he became a dominant force in the final approval of Columbus' plan, a fact little recognized in current Columbian historiography.

Thus the evangelical teachings and dogma of the Francisca order<sup>7</sup> may very well have been the strong motivation for Columbus' repeated affirmation that the primary purpose of his Enterprise of the Indies was to bring Christianity to the New World. In keeping with this theme, Columbus in his *mayorazgo* or will dated 22 February, 1498, specified that a church and hospital were to be erected in Espanola and maintained with four good masters of sacred theology whose main object was to care for the natives and work for their conversion to Christianity. Columbus' wishes as to building the church were carried out by his son Diego, but sadly the church was never used as Columbus intended.

A graphic example to show how Columbus was accepted as a missionary of the Church by his Spanish contemporaries was the inset on Juan de La Cosa's map (Figure 1) which depicted Columbus as St. Christopher<sup>8</sup> carrying the Christ Child on his back to the New World. This inserted drawing which occupied a large and central position on Juan de La Cosa's map of the Indies shows Columbus in an allegorical but clear depiction as a Christian missionary, rather than a conquistador seeking gold and slaves.

It is interesting to note that Juan de La Cosa depicted a bearded Columbus while most other portraits of Columbus show him clean shaven. Most sailors of the time were clean shaven when ashore in Spain, but would let their beards grow at sea where shaving facilities (primarily water) were scarce or non-existent. Marquis Belloy also illustrated Columbus with a beard while at sea and immediately on his return to Spain (Peck 1993:10, 14, Figs. 2 & 4). The inset on La Cosa's map shows Columbus on his 1492 voyage, but it suggests that Columbus was also bearded on his other voyages at sea.

Although not his primary goal, Columbus had never doubted that the acquisition of gold was vital to accomplishment of his overall mission. His letters and other writings clearly show that gold was not for personal gain, but was to be returned to the Spanish crown to be used to extend the Christian empire of Spain and to fund a crusade for the deliverance of Jerusalem from Islamic control. Las Casas reported that when Columbus in his 1494 voyage sent his military commander Alonso de Hojeda into the interior of Espanola seeking gold mines, he admonished



**Figure 1: Redrawn inset from Juan de La Cosa's map of the Indies (circa 1500) showing Columbus as St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child to the New World.**

him that the gold was to come from the mines and not the personal possession of the Indians since Their Highnesses Ferdinand and Isabel were more interested in converting the natives to Christianity and loyal subjects than obtaining their gold (Morison 1974:120).

But what of Columbus' practice of taking slaves, and was this in conflict with his stated primary interest in converting the Indians to Christianity? There is categorically no conflict with Columbus authorizing the taking of Indian slaves and his well-documented desire that they be converted to Christianity and treated in a humane manner. Columbus authorized the Indian slaves under the then current legal and accepted European system of *repartamiento* which was adopted in the Middle Ages by Spain early in the Moorish re-conquest campaigns and well

before Columbus' voyage.<sup>9</sup> Even the word slaves or slavery is a misnomer when applied to the actions incumbent in Spanish conquest historiography as it should be more properly called bondage, but by widespread common usage has become synonymous with slavery. The internationally institutionalized and accepted system of *repartamiento* provided that once the ownership of a conquered land was established, whether it was in Spain on lands occupied by the Moors, or on foreign soil (Africa, Canaries, or Columbus' Espanola) the occupants of the land automatically became bonded vassals (or by common usage, slaves) of the occupiers. Superimposed on the system was a complicated set of Spanish laws that governed the legal rights, pay, work conditions, and human treatment of the vassals or slaves. This basic system or law of *repartamiento* governing bonded vassals caught up in military conquests was not confined to the Spanish crown, but was in common use throughout European sovereign states.

Most historians without foundation wrongly accuse Columbus of inventing or initiating the system of *repartamiento* on Espanola in order to justify taking slaves although some (equally in error) name Bobadilla or Bartolome Colon as the culprit. Davidson has brought out the fact that the "political correct," but historically inaccurate, image of the Spaniards and Columbus as guilty of immoral use of slavery has contributed to the growth of the "Black Legend" of Spain (Davidson 1997:445). Another historical fallacy is the popular view that while Columbus advocated taking slaves, Queen Isabel was opposed to slavery. Isabel never questioned the legal rights of bondage provided by *repartamiento*, but only some of the fine technical points related to Columbus' interpretation or administration of the system.

The strongest and most substantial affirmation of Columbus' missionary purpose and goal of his voyage is revealed in his treatise; *Libro de las Profecias*, or Book of Prophecies (West-Kling 1991; Brigham 1990, 1991). This book was published in the year 1501, only five years before his death, however, the document was the result of a lifelong systematic study of the Bible and the writings of Biblical authorities. There is clear evidence in his detailed notes that Columbus started this document in early 1481 to support his plan of discovery which he later named the Enterprise of the Indies.

Most modern historians put Columbus' *Libros de las Profecias* down as just the incoherent ranting of a bitter and disillusioned old man. Again this view differs sharply from early historians of Columbus' time, and for several generations following, who saw it as a viable, lucid, and coherent treatise. The false impression of this work by Columbus among modern historians is probably because they do not consider the allegorical style of writing in the book, which only follows the style of most church clerics and humanists of the time. Another reason for so much critical misinterpretation of the document is that it is just what Columbus said it was, a collection of notes to be used at a later date in writing an epic poem, a literary style common to the period.

The *Libros de las Profecias* presents Columbus' argument that the fundamental objective of his Enterprise of the Indies was the cause of furthering Christianity beyond the shores of Europe. The discovery of the route to the Indies and the material wealth that it would bring was thus to serve only as a means to defend and further evangelical Christian influence in Europe, the Holy Land, and the Indies. Another theme of the document was that his voyage was a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (hence the name) to spread the faith, rather than just a result of his reason and planning, and supported his firm belief that he had a Divine mission to make that prophecy come true. Of Columbus' many Biblical references to support his adopted role as a divinely-ordered missionary, the one he used most often and perhaps the most apropos was, Isaiah 60:9; "For the



**Figure 2: Columbus protecting the Indians from harm. Illustration from the 1878 biography by the French historian Marquis Belloy. Copy courtesy of the Columbus Museum, Columbus, Wisconsin.**

islands wait for me, and the ships of the sea in the beginning; that I may bring thy sons from afar.”

Columbus’ documented study of the Bible and related philosophical writings to support his thesis is truly impressive. The document contains some forty-odd quotes from scripture, and over 50 quotes from Ancient and Medieval humanists, from Aristotle to Pierre d’Ailly. This could easily be looked on in today’s pragmatic world as irrelevant overkill of the subject, penned by a religious fanatic, which may account for its limited acceptance within the academic community. But just the sheer number of these references would indicate that Columbus was far better read and educated in the theological mysticism of the time than most historians would

have us believe. And this scholarly treatise, which explains Columbus' high religious and moral goal for the voyage, does not fit the current "politically correct" picture of a crude and unprincipled entrepreneur bent only on seeking gold and slaves for personal gain.

The writers and historians in the centuries following the death of Columbus were able to study and interpret the contemporary history of Columbus' actions and beliefs accurately and pictured Columbus as a devout Christian and a sincere and impassioned protector of the human rights of the Indians. This theme, common to early writers from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, was graphically and dramatically shown by an illustration from the 1878 biography of Columbus by the respected French historian Marquis Belloy (Figure 2). Belloy was only one of many European and American historians and biographers during this long period spanning four centuries that showed Columbus in a favorable light.

One has only to note the name of the considerable number of cities, towns, parks, and streets in the USA to confirm this long and strongly held respect that Columbus held in the minds of both the academic and lay public. And during the 1892 grandiose celebration of the fourth anniversary of Columbus' discovery voyage there was a concerted but unsuccessful effort to change the geographical name of America to Columbia. But the view of Columbus as a respected and even revered figure of history changed abruptly in the late twentieth century.

It is difficult to say just when the present politically correct (but historically incorrect) view of Columbus as an unprincipled entrepreneur, interested only in gold and brutally enslaving the Indians, took hold in the minds of the academic and lay public. I have used the term "abrupt change," but this is only in the context of the change occurring within one generation after well over four centuries of the opposing consensus. Popular writings which fuel such political acts (or protests) as vandalizing and defacing statues and portraits of Columbus usually draw on academically acceptable writing for legitimacy. A review of academic writings of the twentieth century indicates that a portion of the writings of the respected and widely read historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, may well have been the primary catalyst that started or added momentum to this change in public opinion.

In 1974 Morison published; *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages*, which contained a detailed history of Columbus' four voyages including his efforts at founding a colony on Hispaniola. Morison's book rapidly became the bible of reference works on the subject and has been widely used and quoted by both academic and popular writers. In his account of the initial colony on Hispaniola (Española), Morison was guilty of both biased and inaccurate historiography and literary sensationalism when he stated:

"The *repartamiento* system, which later spread to all Spanish America, was begun by Columbus. This meant that grants were made to the individual colonist with the natives there living, who were his to have and hold, *exploit, punish, or torture as he chose*, subject always (Spanish apologists are fond of pointing out) to the laws of the Indies which enjoined conversion and kind treatment. But these were seldom enforced. *This cruel policy initiated by Columbus* and relentlessly pursued by his successors *resulted in genocide*" (Morison 1974:136, emphasis added).

For Morison to assert that Columbus "initiated slavery" in the Spanish Americas and granted the colonists the right to "exploit, punish, or torture, as they chose," and this "cruel policy resulted in genocide" of the Indians is an appallingly gross travesty on true and accurate history.

And Morison compounds his misreading of history by labeling historians who report true history (Davidson 1997:445) as “Spanish apologists.” As noted earlier, the well established and legally defined system of *repartamiento* was not “begun by Columbus.” Although the accepted system of bondage was not initiated by Columbus, he did use it as authority to grant Indians to the colonists, but certainly not to “exploit, punish, or torture as he chose.” There is every indication that Columbus believed the bonded slaves he had granted would be treated kindly and eventually converted to Christianity in accordance with his charter from the crown. While Morison’s inaccurate view of history may have been a major factor that initiated the dark view of Columbus; it was the many later popular writings that set the degrading and historically inaccurate image so firmly in the minds of the lay public.

Contemporary with the writings of Morison the Spanish “Black Legend,” with Columbus as the figurehead, was revived in the twentieth century when historians as well as humanist, philosophical, and moralist writers turned their attention to an examination of the early conquest of the New World. In the vanguard of this movement stands the published writings on the Spanish conquest by Tzvetan Todorov, a respected Bulgarian philosopher and humanist residing in France. In his introduction of *The Conquest of America*, Todorov stated: “I have chosen to narrate a history. Closer to myth than to argument, it is nonetheless to be distinguished from myth on two levels; first because it is a true story (which myth could, but need not be), and second because my main interest is less a historian’s than a moralist’s; the present is more important to me than the past” (Todorov 1984:4). Todorov’s basic premise on which he bases his conclusions is flawed. He chose to narrate a history of the conquest of America which he asserted was based on a true story. His narration of history consists of only a few chosen incidents taken out of their broad historical context. And an unbiased and searching analysis of these chosen incidents revealed that they do not stand the test of being a “true story.”

Todorov’s book is centered on the initial conquest of Mexico by Cortes and his soldiers and includes the actions of some of the conquistadors and colonists who immediately followed to establish *Nueva Espana* in Mexico. To develop his thesis, Todorov cites every one of the random extant reported atrocities by individual Spanish soldiers or colonists in detail. These identical reports (some true, some apocryphal) have been repeated *ad nauseam*, first by French and English writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to first establish the Spanish Black Legend and lately by American writers to sell a popular politically correct book. The title of Todorov’s book; *The Conquest of America* is misleading and it would have been more appropriately titled; “The Condemnation of Selected Spanish Conquistadors.”

Todorov has established credentials as an astute intellectual, philosopher, and humanist, but he lacks the attributes of a good historian. He takes every one of the reported acts as historically true without considering the context in which the alleged act was performed, the bias or trustworthiness of the reporter, or whether it is a first-hand or hearsay report from sources widely separated in space and time. Nearly all of the reports of Spanish atrocities originated with Spanish priests; Las Casas, Landa, Sahagun, Duran, Motolino, and other unnamed Dominican friars. The adversarial role and animosity between the priests on the one hand and the soldiers and settlers on the other, is a well established historical fact. This animosity stemmed from a contest for who would hold the high offices that controlled the newly formed colonies. In this scenario the well educated priests had the advantage of the pen and they were prolific in writing letters, reports, and books to support their cause. It would seem only natural that they would exaggerate the random criminal acts of their hated adversaries (acts which were against Spanish law and the edicts of the crown) in order to further their own interests.

Todorov uses one particular incident as the hallmark of his thesis. This incident, in Bishop Diego de Landa's *Relacion de la Cosas de Yucatan* relates how a young Maya woman refused to submit to Captain Alonso Lopez de Avila because she was being faithful to her husband who was away at war, so he had her thrown to the dogs for execution (Landa 1990:76). There are several things that make this account suspect. Lopez de Avila was an officer in Francisco de Montejo's earlier conquest of Yucatan (when the alleged event occurred) and would have been acquainted with Montejo's insistence, under threat of severe punishment, that the Maya be treated in a respectful and humane fashion. Oviedo emphasized this point when he reported that Montejo had tried and executed Hernando Palomino, one of his hidalgo captains (like Lopez de Avila) in Yucatan because Palomino in a fit of rage had killed a Maya slave that was serving him (Chamberlain 1966:48; Oviedo 1944). Lopez de Avila would have been acutely aware of this incident so it is doubtful that he would risk execution by ordering a virtuous Maya woman be "thrown to the dogs."

Landa in this part of his book was reporting on the high moral standards of the Maya women and used this incident to illustrate that point rather than report an atrocity. And Landa was in Yucatan and wrote his book long after the alleged incident took place so his information was from second or third hand, and quite possibly biased sources, such as Landa's fellow Franciscans anxious to show Montejo and his officers in a bad light (Peck 2005:374-379). The Spaniards used highly trained dogs (and only a few were kept on hand) to run down and disable an enemy soldier, at which time he was captured or killed with a sword. An extended period of time is required for dogs to kill an adult human and the traditional Spanish method of execution was by hanging or by the sword, so how this woman was punished or perhaps executed is suspect. Landa's late hearsay report might very well be apocryphal in the same manner as some of the ostensibly contrived fictionalized reports by Martyr, Oviedo, and Gomara during this same period. Yet Todorov dedicated his book "to the memory of a Mayan woman devoured by dogs," to condemn, - not the individual who allegedly perpetrated the patently illegal and criminal act, - but the entire Spanish nation. And collateral condemnation fell on the shoulders of Columbus as initiating the Spanish "Conquest of America" with his 1492 voyage even though Todorov may not have had that intention.<sup>10</sup>

Todorov's book appeared on the scene when popular historical and humanist writers in America were deeply involved in a philosophical evaluation of the prior role of our government in the mistreatment of black slaves and the indigenous American Indians. In a classic example of misinterpretation of history, these opportunist writers soon found a scapegoat for the immoral treatment of the indigenous Indians in the voyage of Columbus and the subsequent Spanish conquest of America. The typical moralistic argument of the many popular writers who promoted this revival of the Spanish Black Legend with Columbus as the figurehead can be seen in Kirkpatrick Sale's widely read best-selling book; *The Conquest of Paradise* (1990). Sale cites the well-trodden random examples of inhumane acts by Spanish conquistadors and settlers used by Todorov and the numerous preceding popular and opportunist writers. Sale's principle theme is that Columbus' greed for gold and slaves was the driving force of his voyage. This unfounded, but politically correct dark image of Columbus and his voyage is common principally in American literature and its appearance on the scene has been confined to the latter part of the twentieth century.

The earlier examples of portraiture style art pictured Columbus in the sixteenth-century as an evangelical missionary of Christianity (Figure 1) and later in the early nineteenth-century as a protector of the Indians (Figure 2). The graphical view of Columbus in portraiture style art has



**Figure 3: The portrait of Columbus by Leonardo Lasansky, commissioned by the Associates of the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota. Reproduced with permission**

also followed the change in literature and changed radically in the late twentieth century. A prominent example of this late twentieth century art is the caricature portrait of Columbus by Leonardo Lasansky (Figure 3), commissioned by the Associates of James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota.

Lasansky's portrait, while technically good quality art, is in reality an inappropriate and grossly exaggerated political statement in bad taste. This portrait is filled with allegorical metaphors degrading Columbus that are quite apparent with close examination by a practiced eye. The shadowy, pudgy face of Columbus in the portrait shows features that are Semitic or Hebrew in nature and the tightly curled black hair is closely Negroid in appearance. The thin lipped down-turned mouth appears to have a drool or slobber draining down from the right side. The right hand has the thick short fingers of a male that appears to be holding a rock, while the left hand has the long slender fingers of a female. The jacket and vest, and particularly the striped shirt and black string tie, are those of a river-boat gambler. But the most glaring negative feature of the portrait is the ill-defined hat that resembles an inverted horn, the totem or



Figure 4: A portrait of Columbus contained in a larger illustration in the 1878 biography by the French historian Marquis [Belloy](#). Copy courtesy of the Columbus Museum, Columbus, Wisconsin.

symbol of Beelzebub or Satan. It is not the intent of this study to criticize the artist for making a strong negative political statement which he has every right to do, but this work of art should have been displayed in an avant-garde art gallery rather than given the dignity and tacit approval by being displayed in one of our leading universities.

The characteristic physical features portrayed in [Lasansky's](#) portrait are at the opposite scale of Columbus' actual appearance which exhibited the strong character traits from his northern Italian Germanic or Gothic ancestors. Las [Casas](#) described Columbus in his *Historia de las Indias* (1951) as more than middling tall with a long face, blue eyes, light complexion, and red beard and hair which gave him an impressive air of authority. Lasansky's portrait was not intended to show accurate physical features; instead it was to suggest to the viewer the real nature of Columbus' intrinsic character and personality, and in this he has also failed to present an accurate view. The anonymous artist who drew Columbus in Figure 4 captured the strong Caucasian or Germanic facial features and the "impressive air of authority" described by Las Casas far better than any of the several published portraits of Columbus that are available.

Although the early favorable image of Columbus that prevailed for over four centuries may have been overstated to a degree, it is nevertheless closer to historical truth because it was based on first-hand reliable primary sources. In contrast the relatively recent change to an unfavorable image of Columbus has been based on sweeping conclusions reached by interpretation of questionable second or third hand reports of illegal and criminal acts by a relatively small number of actors in the overall history of the Spanish conquest of America. The same sort of sweeping conclusions could easily be applied to conquerors of the American west (our historians are careful to use the term "settled" rather than "conquered") who committed senseless atrocities and massacres of the indigenous Indians.

It can be argued that in the troubled times of the eighteenth-century; if the Spanish missions in Florida with their large Indian population<sup>11</sup> had been allowed to remain undisturbed as a separate province and eventually assimilated as a State in the Union, then the descendants of the indigenous Florida Indians would now be living as free citizens in the land of their forefathers, rather than subjected to the ethnic cleansing practices of the early American government. One cannot help but be in full sympathy with the outrage that the modern American Indians must feel for the mistreatment of their ancestors, but this study suggests that it is inappropriate to blame Columbus for their mistreatment rather than the early American government.

The foregoing examples of how the current inaccurate and degrading view of Columbus came about in the minds of the lay public; emphasizes why recognized and accepted historians, humanists, and popular writers, should carefully weigh their published conclusions to be sure they are not acting as a pontifical Torquemada and damning the wrong person.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The “Enterprise of the Indies” was Columbus’ coined name related to his voyages which he envisioned as far more than just voyages of exploration. Columbus’ plan for his Enterprise encompassed widespread settlement and colonization of the area which would vastly expand both the Spanish Empire and the Christian Faith.

<sup>2</sup> Early in the nineteenth-century the French cardinal Roselly de Lorgues and other prominent Church leaders “hailed Columbus as a Catholic Hero and demanded that his name should be included in the calendar of saints” (Jane 1988:xviii).

<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand’s biography was published in Italian rather than in Spanish and in 1671, 12 years after his death, which has led many scholars to doubt its authenticity. These facts and its close resemblance to parts of Las Casas’ *Historia de las Indias* have been presented as evidence that it may constitute a plagiarized document with questionable historical truth

<sup>4</sup> Immediately on landing and encountering the Indians on Guanahani Columbus expressed his desire to spread Christianity by stating: “I recognized that they [the Indians] were people who would be better freed and converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force” (Dunn-Kelley 1989:65). Knowing his log would be read by the Sovereigns Columbus followed this first affirmation with a number of similar notes emphasizing conversion of the Indians to Christianity and loyal subjects of the Crown (Dunn-Kelley 1989:143,231,247,259,265,273).

<sup>5</sup> There is very little mention of Fray Marchena in extant Spanish court records so he is given little attention by leading American historians. Morison briefly mentioned that Columbus talked with Marchena, “an astronomer of repute” (Morison 1974:34), but did not report the significant importance or reason for Marchena’s support of Columbus’ Enterprise of the Indies. Davidson citing Morison (1974) and Wilford (1991) as sources pictured Marchena as only a minor and relatively unimportant player on the scene (Davidson 1997:122). This more thorough account of Columbus’ historically important relationship to Fray Marchena is from the extensive research of Paolo Emilio Taviani in Spanish, Italian, and other European archives and private libraries and documented in his several published works on Columbus (Taviani 1984, 1985, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> A detailed report of the Islamic expansion and its close relationship to justification and approval of Columbus’ voyage is contained in Obregon’s *The Columbus Papers* (1991:3), and in Taviani’s *Christopher Columbus: The Grand Design* (1985:168-170).

<sup>7</sup> There is no firm evidence that Columbus ever took the vows of the Franciscan order, but he designated he should be buried in the brown habit of the order and he was reported to have worn the course brown robe and rope belt on several occasions in appearances before the court.

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<sup>8</sup> St. Christopher is purported to be one of the earliest Saints of Christianity. He was a simply but huge Italian peasant who asked how he could do penance and serve the Lord Jesus. He was told to stand by a shallow but strong river that had lost its bridge and carry Christian pilgrims across on his back. While carrying a small child across the river the burden became so heavy that he could hardly carry the load and when he asked why his load had become so heavy the child answered it is because you are carrying the Holy Christ Child.

<sup>9</sup> The system of bondage known as *repartamiento* and its allied system of *encomienda* (the two are often confused) are more fully discussed in Marc Bloch's *Feudal Society* (1961). The subject is also covered in Miles H. Davidson's *Columbus Then and Now*, in which he stated: "The words *repartamiento* and *encomienda* have become confused with slavery in the minds of many of Columbus' biographers." – "And failure to understand the internationally institutionalized commend system has contributed to the growth over the centuries of the "Black Legend" of Spain" (Davidson 1997:444-445).

<sup>10</sup> Todorov recognized and cited evidence to show that Columbus' goal was the furtherance of Christianity and not gold or slaves which were perceived as only necessary material means to support that end. Having established that Columbus could not be blamed for immoral and inhumane treatment of the Indians; Todorov then in a long and involved but scholarly overkill of the subject places the blame on the psyche of the Spanish people involved in the conquest.

<sup>11</sup> A comprehensive history of the Spanish era in Florida; during the period when up to 34,000 Indians were living peacefully in Missions where they were provided housing, schools, and hospital care under the *repartamiento* system, is covered in Michael Gannon's book; *The Cross in the Sand* (1983).

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