

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGE TEACHING

TEACHING THE CULTURE OF SPAIN
WITH A CHRISTIAN MIND

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Spanish culture has attracted a great deal of attention. Anthropologists, historians, artists, writers, language specialists, and travelers are just a few who have been lured to a culture that traces its origins back to Celtic and Iberian settlements (500 B.C.)¹. After a number of invasions throughout the centuries, this unique culture started 500 years ago to spread out beyond the unknown seas to the American Continent.

Today, in the U.S.A., Spanish culture is a popular subject. Spanish language and culture are being taught in thousands of high-schools, colleges and universities. In an attempt to improve the understanding and relationship with the Spanish-speaking people within and without the United States, young people are showing much interest in that language spoken by nearly 250 million souls. Of course, language and culture join together and point at the geographical origin, the so-called "madre patria" (mother homeland) of the Hispanic-American community: Spain.

From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, understanding the roots of this community is critical at this point in time. Spanish has become one of the two main languages in the Adventist church (as far as members speaking it). One of five Adventist members speaks Spanish, and this trend continues to grow.

This paper is written to help instructors of college classes like "Spain and its Culture", "Spanish Cultural Perspectives", "Socio-Culture of Spain", or "Spanish Anthropology" to integrate

the subject matter and the student's own beliefs and values. The course, whatever its name may be, deals with the geography, customs, life-style, traditions, personality traits, etc. of Spaniards.

But, why is this type of course included in almost any Spanish major and minor offered by Adventist institutions? First, students will only start to master the language once they have studied the culture. Second, comparison and contrast of their culture with the one under study, will bring them to self-understanding. Third, the knowledge of a foreign culture will produce a development of tolerance and appreciation for other people's values. And fourth, their familiarity with the new culture will make possible the desire to share their own values and beliefs with the people from that culture. This adds an important missionary dimension of great appreciation for the Adventist church.

In an attempt to integrate Adventist doctrines, practice, and subject matter (the major concern of this paper), the following purposes have been established:

1. Enumerate and explain a number of cultural instances from traditional life in Spain (i.e., family, entertainment, lifestyle...) dealing with moral/religious implications.
2. Draw a lesson/s from each of the cultural instances having to do with Adventist doctrines or moral values.
3. Propose an instructional model for the students to elicit responses of value acquisition, doctrinal instruction, doctrinal examination, or religious life self-analysis, as a result of teaching these cultural instances.

The implementation of this approach is meant to produce an unique way to teach this subject from a distinctively Adventist Christian perspective. The method of paralleling the cultural

aspect with a morale may affect not only the doctrinal/value knowledge of students but also their very religious attitudes and practices.

In order to make this method most effective, the instructor might use one or two class periods to ask the students questions such as what do you see as significant differences between your culture and the Spanish culture (at least what you know about it)? why do you consider them significantly different? what do you think is of value in the Spanish culture? and in your own culture? These questions will stimulate thought about what an individual can learn and even adopt from a culture and they will introduce the students to the critical analysis of the class contents.

In approaching this topic, it is necessary to refer to the work of H. Richard Niebuhr.² He describes five different ways to understand culture from a Christian perspective:

1. Christ OF Culture (Culture is always good)
2. Christ ABOVE Culture (Culture is basically good but deficient)
3. Christ AND Culture (Culture relatively evil, yet necessary)
4. Christ AGAINST Culture (Culture is evil)
5. Christ TRANSFORMER of Culture (Culture fallen, yet redeemable)

When evaluating the cultural aspects of this paper, view number three will be adopted in most cases. Culture here is observed, studied, and used as a source of moral and religious learning. It is sometimes seen as good, sometimes as evil, but whatever the case might be, the most important thing is to choose the good behavior and reject the evil. The basis on which a decision is made regarding the positiveness or negativeness of a cultural practice is that of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

I. FAMILY

Family has traditionally been a nourished institution in Spain. Family members there are aware of a strong sense of belonging. Children do not leave their homes unless they get married. It is not uncommon for adult working children to turn in their paychecks to the family administrator (normally the mother) to contribute to the family budget. They then might have to ask her several times throughout the month for money to cover their own personal expenses.

Several family practices are peculiar to the traditional Spanish family. However, two have been chosen for their general outreach, and for their moral application: the daily family gatherings and the chauvinism within the home.

Daily Family Gatherings

Both at "comida" (dinner) and "cena" (supper) each home has an informal chat. This might go on for half-an-hour or more after "comida" and sometimes 1-2 hours after "cena". This is the perfect moment to comment the events of the day, the hilarious happenings, and the worries of each family member. In summertime, these gatherings take place outside the home, sitting on a chair with other neighbours joining.

The moral objective here would be that the student recognizes the importance of family nurturance through systematic interaction. This objective might well be achieved presenting various family ways of interacting. For example, the typical way the Spanish do, that of utilizing the household as a mere residence, the viewing of TV during meal time, and so on. Then, a discussion can be initiated about the advantages and disadvantages of each of them.

Chauvinism

The Spanish family is traditionally patriarchal.³ Mother's opinion counts if father doesn't oppose. If father is not in agreement, his opinion goes. This is a culture characteristic much weakened today in Spain, but with clear strength in the immediate past. In every-day life, many women are told to remain at home and denied any social interaction, while their husbands go to play cards, hunt, play sports, etc. Nevertheless, women in Spain have found a balanced way to be in control as long as it publicly appears that the man still is in power.

The Biblical principle that can be taught here is one of sex equality and mutual respect as commanded by the Lord. A moral dilemma might be presented for discussion with the class, including a family situation with a clear crisis due to the chauvinism of the father or brothers. Using the steps pointed out by Silver,⁴ students would (a) confront the dilemma, (b) state a tentative position, (c) examine the reasoning for the position, and (d) summarize reasons and reflect on an individual position in resolving the dilemma. Then in closing, the instructor could share Bible texts that prove the dignity of human beings, regardless of gender.

II. ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment is such a part of Spanish life that their culture could not possibly be studied apart from it. Kany⁵ recorded about forty different fiestas within a period of a year. There are national, regional, and local holidays, and Spaniards love celebrating them all. Their tradition places much emphasis on religious holidays, so many festivals have a religious meaning. In addition to traditional holidays, people in Spain fill their

leisure time relating to neighbors, talking, and walking. Walking is, in fact, one of the prime forms of entertainment. A representation of their entertaining activities includes El Paseo (walking), bullfighting, and gambling.

El Paseo

J.G. Escribano⁶ attempts to answer the question why the Spaniards spend so much time doing something (walking) which may seem rather boring by saying that they love to be surrounded by people. In addition, further insights can be found in the temperament of Spaniards. People don't find relaxation at home. They need to go out and move, explore, and observe. If it weren't for this characteristic, the thrust of the "conquistadores" could hardly be understood. Also, people in Spain seem to show a special enjoyment doing simple things. Walking can be one of the most enjoyable activities for a family or group of friends to do at the end of the day.

A beautiful lesson that can be learned from this custom is that of simplicity in recreation. Often, sophisticated ways of entertainment are planned in the family, in school, or social group; but when we look at people who thoroughly enjoy a simple walk along the streets of town, we can start understanding the positiveness of this practice.

Teaching students to appreciate simple recreation can be attempted through field assignments, like observing and interviewing people--preferably from the Spanish culture--who have learned to enjoy the wonders of a simple walk.

Bullfighting

This is a practice which once was the most popular of the Spanish festivals. Today its popularity has decreased considerably, but is kept due to its cultural significance and for the enjoyment of tourists and foreign visitors. Nevertheless, the traditional interest of Spaniards towards this game/sport shows personal

characteristics associated with it, i.e., boldness, braveness. As defined by Americo Castro, the bull fight is "an encounter between a courageous man and a ferocious beast."⁷ For this reason, bull ranches in Spain have been extremely careful to breed a race of aggressive cattle not found anywhere else in the world. So, the matador "fearlessly" faces this bull to show how he is able to kill the animal with a simple sword.

Manhood is another characteristic underlining bullfighting. As mentioned before, men are somehow superior to women and that is why "toreros" or "matadores" are men.⁸ Besides, their rival is a bull, a male. Aggressive cows are a regular outcome from breeders, but those would never be acceptable. Another trait found in Spaniards is that of confronting death face to face through the bullfighting experience. A traditional Spaniard would never fear death, even though it was near. Death is perceived as a partner, rather than as enemy or something to cover up and ignore.

What Christian attributes can be taught from this cruel practice? Being bold or brave is certainly of value. Life brings many challenges which produce a sense of fear in Christians. Here is where boldness and courage are important. Of course, this courage comes from God, not man (or in the best of the cases from the inspiration of some young lady in the arena to whom the bullfighter dedicates his labor). This lesson can be taught to students by studying the steps taken in the bullfighting ritual from beginning to end. Then, the students can be asked to find indications of self-sufficiency, self-exaltation, self-confidence, etc., throughout the bullfight show. Then the class can discuss how Christian fighting with those weapons is bound to lose the eternal battle.

Gambling

This is an activity that continues to the present. During 1987, Spaniards spent more money gambling than any other European country, and Spain ranked second in the world with its countrywide gambling expenditures. There are

several kinds of national lotteries, a number of casinos for the rich and not-so-rich gamblers, local lotteries, handicap lotteries, festival celebrations, fund-raising lotteries for graduation trips, etc. The reason why all these continue is because people keep putting money into them. Spaniards are gamblers by nature. They might be in need of necessary items but renounce them to "invest" in a lottery. This has created an addiction in many individuals. They spend all their money and borrow further amounts to continue gambling. Eventually they and their families fall to ruin.

The objective for this topic is to make the student aware of the vicious cycle gambling produces. The presentation of a dilemma, as described before, in which a member of a family is increasingly taking and spending money to gamble is an excellent way to elicit a discussion about gambling. Students will then realize that the effect of gambling is so powerful that only through God's grace could someone get free from it. This principle of dependence from God in order to gain self-control can be taken to many other areas of life.

III. LIFESTYLE

The lifestyle of Spain has been traditionally characterized as slow paced with little anxiety or hurry. Office business schedules favor this kind of lifestyle. Normally, people work between 9 am and 1 pm and between 4 pm and 8 pm. Many attempts have been made to change this, but all have been unsuccessful. Individuals in Spain love that 3-hour (4 in summer) break in the middle of the day for dinner and relaxation. Compared to the United States, cars are used much less in Spain. A twenty-minute walk to work is not unusual and is usually done four times a day. Therefore, the speed and stress of driving is, by and large, removed from the daily life

of most Spaniards. Let's examine the siesta and the typical diet/drinking pattern as two examples unique to Spanish lifestyle.

Siesta

Dinner time is important for every member of a family. After completing about half of their labor, workers go home to have dinner and their siesta. Siestas are most popular in summertime and in areas of high temperature. They might be 1-2 hours of sleep on the couch or in bed. Even if people do not sleep, they keep the siesta by relaxing, talking, reading the newspaper or taking a walk. Then, at 4 or 5 pm they work until 8 or 9. Then, Spaniards have their "cena" and relaxing time until bedtime (which is around 11 or 12).

A lesson students can learn from this is that of avoiding life styles or environments which put us under a lot of stress. Those jobs or careers that might jeopardize family ties or spiritual growth should be questioned. In general, students need to learn to organize time in such a way that they will accomplish their work while at the same time keeping a healthy frame of mind. They need to learn to establish goals that help them become organized as well as help them become good Christians and community members.

A practical strategy proposed by Simon and others⁹ helps teach this lesson. It is called an "Alternatives Search" and consists of directing a discussion of life styles along with the importance of considering alternatives to the way we live. Then, a large number of ideas can be generated through brainstorming and small group discussions to create additional alternatives. Eventually, each student should choose three alternatives they like best and rank them in order of preference.

Diet/Drinking

The fact that people in Spain enjoy one of the highest life expectancy indexes in the world might be due to their pace of life or to other unknown variables, but is probably not due to their eating habits. A very simple breakfast (coffee and roll), an abundant dinner (three courses) and a late, yet rich, supper are the main meals of the day. Add to this an "almuerzo" (a snack) a couple of hours after breakfast made up of pork cold cuts, a "merienda" (snack) between dinner and supper, "aperitivos" (appetizers) before the main meals, several cups of coffee, and probably wine, beer, or other alcohol throughout the day. Diet in Spain is rich in animal fats (predominantly pork). The country is blessed with an abundant variety of fruits and vegetables, but meats are preferred and the major part of a Spaniard's diet.

It has been said that after France and Germany, Spain has more alcohol consumption "per capita" of all western civilization. Alcohol is cheap and poured on the family table. It is even served to children mixed with ginger ale. Alcohol has broken many families and has brought disgrace and embarrassment to many individuals. Spanish society is currently suffering from the effects of a large number of alcoholics.

From this, a temperance lesson can easily be taught to students. As a practical exercise, students can figure out with pencil and paper the dietary imbalance of the typical Spanish diet. Then they can propose alternative dietary plans based on the available produce of Spain. Students can also contrast their own diet with that of the Spanish in order to not fall into similar errors in dietary practice.

IV. RELIGION

Spain is considered the spiritual reservation of western culture. There is, indeed, a strong Roman Catholic tradition underlying almost every dimension of life in Spain. Even if one is not a fervent believer, it is difficult to escape from Catholicism

since it is entangled in most customs. Four examples of this influence are found in easter, communion, death and burial, and religious intolerance.

Easter

There is a lot of preparation for Easter. First, Carnival is celebrated about 40 days before Resurrection Sunday. This is a time when holiday and fun are taken to the extreme. Then on Ash Wednesday, right after Mardi Gras the sinner (sometimes still drunk) is reminded by placing ash on his head that someday he will return to dust. This contrasts the previous excessive enjoyment with the beginning of Lent. Many promises are made for these forty days: no smoking, no drinking, no eating meat, going to mass every day. The activities become more solemn as Holy Week nears. This is perhaps the climactic experience for the believer. Processions start on Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Resurrection) and continue through Saturday. The more one participates in these processions, the more he/she pleases God, Jesus, and Mary. Young men and women march in front of the image of Mary or Jesus, and others bear on their shoulders 2000-pound images on platforms (Pasos) in a procession that might go for 3-5 hours. Some even take off their shoes to earn additional merit toward their salvation. Finally, after processional week is Resurrection Sunday, and people break their fasts and promises of the previous forty days, indulging again their appetites.

Although all these activities are loaded with folkloric ritual, it might help people to understand the message of Redemption. Therefore, these activities can help the students to consolidate their concepts of Salvation and Redemption. The vivid representation of the last days of Jesus' life, the contrast between profane and sacred, and the varied attitudes shown by people during these festivals may help the Christian grasp a spiritual understanding of these events. In addition, the Spaniards attempt to gain salvation through the aimless sufferings involved in keeping Lent may add insight to the message of justification by faith.

As a teaching strategy for this, teachers can have their students enumerate possible results from the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour as well as the results of a person's effort and sacrifice as the only way to achieve salvation. Students will appreciate the contrast in the lives of these two individual types and will value best the doctrine of justification by faith.

Communion

This is a key doctrine of all Roman Catholics and, of course, in the lives of the majority of Spaniards. As soon as boys and girls reach age 6, they start being prepared for one event rated among the first-3-4 most important happenings in their lives. This is the first communion. Children are taught the meaning and outreach of the word "transubstantiation. The bread of the communion becomes the real flesh of Christ. Then, according to one of the five commandments of the Roman Catholic church, one is to participate in communion at least yearly at Easter. Every mass is the celebration of this sacrament. It gives to one participating the assurance of God's grace. Catholics believe that if one should die shortly after having eaten the Holy Bread, he/she will go to heaven. That is why families call a priest to bring the Viatico (communion) to a mortally sick relative so he/she can face death in God's grace. Not many years back, priests were seen walking in the middle of the streets with the Viatico upheld. Everyone was expected to kneel down for a few seconds as the priest walked by. This practice brought trouble to more than one Adventist believer in the 40's and 50's.¹⁰

As a teacher teaches this unit, the Spanish culture students can learn about Christ's partnership and availability, His permanent disposition to help and listen to our problems, and his desire to always bless everyone without objects or sacraments. This objective can be reached through a brief testimony session in which each student shares how he or she is aware of the presence of Christ in certain moments, and how their prayers are answered.

Death and Burial

Spaniards seem to be very brave in facing their death or that of a loved one. Of course, they do not want it to happen and that is why a number of conditional promises to God are made before the actual death i.e., if he doesn't die, or if I don't die, I will give a certain amount of money to the poor or to the church... Charles Kany reports having seen young ladies offering to cut their beautiful long hair, which they loved dearly, as a sacrifice.¹¹ It is believed that immediately after death, the soul goes directly to heaven or hell; in certain cases it might go to purgatory before going to heaven. The body is then dressed up and placed in the casket. Then it is kept at home for about 24 hours for the velatorio or velorio, a very peculiar type of viewing. The velorio starts with praying and chanting and ends with the most interesting conversations about news and sports. This is due to the long hours spent by the corpse, since it cannot be left alone. After this, usually in the morning, the burial is performed. Family members go to the cemetery, and, after a very short ceremony (usually in Latin), the casket is lowered and covered. The first bits of soil to cover the dead are thrown carefully by the immediate family members. Luto (black clothing) is worn by the family during the following weeks (sometimes months or years). These practices vary widely especially as the culture extended to Latin-America.¹²

In presenting these concepts, on Spanish culture, a teacher can prepare the class to think seriously about life and death. It is a good opportunity for the teacher to remind students about their Biblical beliefs on the state of the dead. The teacher can present Bible texts which teach this doctrine, or the students can look for them in the Bible.

Religious Intolerance

The religious wars against the Moors throughout the Middle Age, the expulsion of Jews at the end of the XV century, and the creation and development of the Inquisition are three good examples--unfortunately not the only ones--of the religious intolerance shown by Spaniards. Americo Castro¹³ writes how the Spanish peculiar way of life came as a result of the "intermingling of three castes, Moors, Jews, and Spaniards." It might then be understood that the dealing

with these two strongly nationalistic religious groups conditioned the people of Spain to adopt a defensive posture regarding their religious beliefs. During the Franco era--1936 to 1975--people having religious beliefs other than Roman Catholic were not given freedoms. Sometimes they were put in jail for months because they refused to attend mass or kneel in the presence of the Holy Bread. When General Franco died, many people stopped attending Roman Catholic worship. They had been practicing Catholicism because of social and political pressure. As soon as intolerance ended, they were free to worship or not worship as they wished.

A Seventh-day Adventist Christian can learn attitudes opposite to those of Spanish intolerance. Forcing decisions on people has never won their sincere conviction or determination. This is contrary to the very nature of God who created people free to make decisions. Intolerance may be shown in religious matters as well as social, political, and daily matters. Perhaps a good objective for this unit would be for students to be tolerant in their every day relationships. Simon and his associates¹⁴ developed a values clarification technique called Self-Contract. This might be appropriate to use in this unit. Once the behaviors to be considered are determined (they can include the showing of tolerance toward others' ways of doing things, pet peeves, etc.) students can put their contracts in writing and sign their names. The contract may be read to a friend or even to the class, if the emotional tone permits; otherwise, students keep it a secret and follow it on their own.

V. GENERAL TRAITS

Some additional traits characteristic of Spaniards in general are included in this section. They are shown both collectively and

individually. They are hospitality, pride/honor, la picaresca (the art of cheating), and human relationships.

Hospitality

A guest of a family in Spain will certainly enjoy excellent treatment. He can be assured that he will be given the best the family has to offer in food, lodging, and especially warmth and companionship. Meals are typically served by courses. Often times it is not known how many courses will be served. Therefore, the guest will probably overeat. This always pleases the hostess. The guest will be well cared for to make him feel at home. At departure time, the family gives him a present, a reminder of the visit, or simply food for the road.

This hospitality is also practiced in the street. If you ask for directions, you will be given complete directions, and not permitted to leave until they are fully understood. In fact, if the destination is not too far away, the Spaniard will offer to walk to where it is without any interest whatsoever other than his personal satisfaction.

One of the objectives to reach in a Christian educational system is that students be kind, helpful, hospitable, and willing to share what they have been given. To help teach this an instructor might demonstrate hospitality by example. Inviting students to his/her home and offering good food, warmth, love, and concern will be one of the most direct ways of reproducing this kind of behavior in students.

Pride/Honor

Spaniards are proud of their families, their cities, their country and of themselves. Sometimes this pride does not allow them to humble themselves and apologize for something they have done wrong. They often lose great opportunities because of their unwillingness to ask forgiveness or admit they made a mistake. On the other hand, they will not forget something good someone did for them and will be grateful for the rest of their lives.

A similar characteristic that can, like pride be positive and dangerously negative is that of a Spaniard's honor.

Honor is especially meaningful in groups. If someone humiliates a member of the family, the rest of the members will try to revenge the honor of the family, paying back at least the same humiliation. For this reason, some problems might last years, even generations between families and/or communities. Honor is certainly very important for a Spaniard; if he/she gives "palabra de honor" (word of honor) about something, he/she will attempt, even if it causes distress, to carry out the promise or oath. Due to this, business contracts in Spain are often verbal (though not as much as they used to be) especially in rural areas.

The first lesson to use from these Spanish traits is humility. A teacher can use Christ's life to find examples of humility. Students can be asked for episodes in the life of Jesus, which are incompatible to Spanish pride and honor. Then they can analyze how people from other cultures might also be dangerously proud, in a hidden way.

A Christian teacher can show positive honorability through one's belonging to a church group. The teacher can show how Christian indignation occurs when the church as a group is hurt, or a member of the church has been mistreated. Also the honor of being a member of God's family can be a goal established for every student to reach.

La Picaresca or the Art of Cheating

Spanish Picaresque literature (16th c.) shows how much shrewdness and reasoning it takes to get what belongs to someone else without violence or struggle. The name Picaresca comes from the literature of that time, which undoubtedly reflected the reality of that society. In our days, we may wonder why the rented cars in Spain or Italy have a lock to prevent the opening and change of the number of kilometers, but not the cars in Switzerland or Germany. We may also wonder why the tax indexes are higher in Spain than in other countries with a per capita higher income. This is because Spaniards are expected to be tricky or deceitful. It is interesting, though, to

note that cheating is very sophisticated and creative and will hardly be done to any person or institution poorer than the cheater.

One of the goals in Adventist schools should be to prepare citizens that are characterized by their honesty and integrity. In contrasting Spanish behavior to model behavior, students will examine whether or not they are uplifting these principles. Perhaps the analysis of cases dealing with every-day ethics is one of the more adequate methods to teach integrity. Students can create these cases out of their personal observations of life where individuals have to decide on matters, small or large, that deal with honesty.

Human Relationships

A great deal of appreciation for the human relationship is shown throughout the Spaniard's life. Their often talking with friends, family, and unrelated people are an indication of the preferential place of the human touch. It is told that in an open market of Spain, a gentleman offered to buy early in the morning all the vegetables to a lady who had them for sale. Immediately she refused. She explained that if she sold all her vegetables she wouldn't have the opportunity to talk to her many lady friends who would come to buy throughout the day.

After explaining this unit students will reconsider their priorities and determine where they are placing the social relationship with other people in their surroundings. A discussion might be conducted to come up with a balance between both extremes: excessive production without human dealing and excessive human relations at the cost of a poor production.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

The following chart illustrates the principles, lessons, or doctrines inferred from each of the culture topics dealt with:

TOPIC	VALUE/DOCTRINE TO TEACH
Daily Family Gatherings ----->	Family nurturance
Chauvinism ----->	Sex equality
Walking ----->	Simplicity in recreation
Bullfighting ----->	Christian courage
Gambling ----->	Self-control
Siesta ----->	Stress avoidance
Diet/Drinking ----->	Temperance
Easter ----->	Justification by faith
Communion ----->	Friendship with Jesus
Death & Burial ----->	The state of the dead
Religious Intolerance ----->	Tolerance
Hospitality ----->	Hospitality
Pride/Honor ----->	Forgiveness
Picaresca ----->	Honesty
Human Relationships ----->	Value of relating to others

There are many valuable traits to be learned from the culture of Spain, others are not to be imitated, but the most important thing to approach a foreign culture is to use openness and willingness to take the best rather than to criticize the wrong.

Some of the topics outlined are very current, others are in the process of suffering great changes. In a couple of decades a good number of them might be relegated to rural areas of the Iberian Peninsula, since Spain is undertaking important social changes. Nevertheless, it is certain that the Spanish culture will continue to be an important source of intellectual as well as moral/ethical knowledge for a long time.

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