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0521460182 - From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain

Carlos M. N. Eire

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This is the first full-length study of Spanish attitudes toward death and the afterlife in the peak years of the Counter-Reformation. It contains an analysis of the death rituals requested in sixteenth-century Madrid testaments, as well as a detailed account of the ways in which the “good” deaths of King Philip II and St. Teresa of Avila were interpreted by contemporaries. Though focused on death, it also aims to analyze the ethos of Spanish Catholic piety and belief in an age of profound transformations. This is a history of mentalities that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and analyzes the symbiotic relation between beliefs and cultural structures. It is a study of the relation between popular piety and elite theology, between paradigms and deeds, myth and ritual, art and craft. Though concentrating exclusively on Spain, this study places the early modern Spanish mentality in the wider context of the European Reformation and Counter-Reformation and of Western attitudes toward death.

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CARLOS M.N. EIRE

University of Virginia



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Acknowledgments

In the summer of 1983, somewhere between Avila and Madrid, I overheard a most peculiar conversation on a train. At the time, I had not yet fastened onto this project in earnest and still harbored some doubts about the wisdom of switching the focus of my research from Protestant Europe to Catholic Spain. Across the aisle from me, a boy of about ten years of age was talking to his mother about heaven as if he had an intimate knowledge of the place. He not only informed her that St. Peter could not hold any keys “because people in heaven have no bodies, and no hands” but also led her through a celestial language drill. “Do you know what this is called in heaven?”, he asked his mother repeatedly, pointing to objects inside and outside the train and then naming them in some incomprehensible tongue. I cannot recall how long this continued or how his mother reacted to it, but I do know that by the time I stepped off the train I had decided to embark on this project.

More than ten years later, I realize that this was a most unusual exchange and that it was no more representative of the Spanish mentality than another dialogue I heard some months later in a smoky Madrid bar about the shape of Coca-Cola bottles. Nonetheless, I am glad that I allowed this boy’s eccentric fixation on the afterlife to confirm my hunches about the intrinsic merits of this project. I have him to thank for decisively pulling me away from Calvin’s Geneva and planting me firmly in the history of death.

I have many others to thank as well, of course, and for far more substantial assistance. First, I would like to thank John Elliott, who eased my move to Spain in innumerable ways through his support, advice, and

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encouragement. I am also deeply indebted to Sara Nalle and James Amelang, who have guided me with their erudition and insights through the most difficult parts of this project, especially in its latter stages. William Monter, a fellow traveler on the road from Geneva, and Miriam Usher Chrisman and Thomas Brady, from the world of the Reformation, offered sage advice and sorely needed reassurance that I had not wandered down some wrong path. In Madrid, the director and staff of the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos ensured through their congenial professionalism that every afternoon I spent there was both profitable and enjoyable. In Charlottesville, as ever, Erik Midelfort generously shared his wisdom and friendship. James Childress, my chairman in Religious Studies, steadily offered his backing and served as a splendid advocate at the heavenly courts of funding and research leaves. Elizabeth Brennan McManus, my research assistant, deserves special thanks for her work on the bibliography, the index, and the final round of proofreading.

This brings me to those who have placed their trust in me but cannot easily be thanked by name. The U.S.–Spain Joint Committee for Educational and Cultural Affairs got this project off the ground with a fellowship for research in Madrid in 1984. The University of Virginia funded me generously and patiently: with seven summer fellowships 1983–91; a Sesquicentennial Associates Fellowship in 1986–7; an Alumni Association Teaching Award that provided me with a semester’s research leave in 1991; and finally an appointment to the Center for Advanced Study in 1992–3. The School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton has played a pivotal role in the writing of this book by offering me a Membership in 1986–7, and a Visitorship in 1992–3. It was there that I first began to assemble my notes and there that I finished my writing, nourished by its rarefied intellectual atmosphere and its graciousness. Those who have enriched my work at the Institute would make a very long list.

Which, in turn, brings me to another lengthy roster. The hundreds of long-dead Madrileños whose wills I read deserve some apologetic thanks, for I am certain that not a single one of them ever suspected that their choices would be so closely analyzed or that their words would be made so public by a total stranger. Perhaps they would take some comfort in knowing that although I have intruded and eavesdropped, I have also learned much from them. One of the toughest and most valuable lessons conveyed to me by their wills came to me in my sleep when I was

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about one-third of the way into the writing. I dreamt I was poring over a list that contained the names and death dates of my sixteenth-century testators. Suddenly, much to my surprise, *my* name appeared on the roster, with a blurry date next to it that I could not make out. At that instant I became aware of my own mortality in a most immediate way. Moreover, from that point forward, my sources ceased being mere names and became flesh-and-blood people with whom I shared a common predicament.

Fortunately, I have loved ones to thank for keeping such dreams and lessons in perspective. Antonio Nieto Cortadellas, my father, would have been quite drawn to the subject of this book, and he is in large measure responsible for bringing me to it. May it cheer him in that *otro mundo* where he now dwells. My mother, Maria Azucena Eire de Nieto, has imparted her faith to me many times over and has continued to believe in my work all these years even though I write in a language she cannot read. May this gladden her in the here and now. My children, John-Carlos, Evelyn Grace, and Bruno Rowan, all born in the midst of this project, are too young to know how much they help me each day and how they have made this a better book. My wife, Jane Ulrich, knows her part in this fully well. Without her wisdom and love I could not have written this book. So it is that on her birthday, I finish it and dedicate it to her.

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Abbreviations used in footnotes

Libraries and archives

AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid
AHPM	Archivo Histórico de Protocolos, Madrid
BNM	Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid
IVDJ	Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid

Printed works

FHM	<i>Fuentes Históricas sobre la muerte y cuerpo de la Santa Teresa de Jesús (1582–1596)</i> , ed. by J. L. Astigarraga, E. Pacho, and O. Rodríguez (Rome, 1982).
OCASB	<i>Obras Completas de la Beata Ana de San Bartolomé</i> , 2 vols., <i>Monumenta Historica Carmeli Teresiani</i> , 5 (Rome, 1981).
OCST	<i>Obras Completas de Santa Teresa de Jesús</i> , ed. by Efrén de la Madre de Dios, O.C.D., 3 vols., <i>Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos</i> (Madrid, 1954).
PBC	<i>Procesos de Beatificación y Canonización de Santa Teresa de Jesús</i> , ed. by Silverio de Santa Teresa, O.C.D., 3 vols., <i>Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana</i> , 18–20 (Burgos, 1934–35).
Tejada	<i>Colección de Cánones y de todos los concilios de la Iglesia Española</i> , ed. by Juan Tejada y Ramiro, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1855).

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