

STUDIES IN SPANISH RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

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CARLOS G. NOREÑA

STUDIES IN SPANISH
RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

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by

CARLOS G. NOREÑA



MARTINUS NIJHOFF / THE HAGUE / 1975

To Victoria, my favorite daughter

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1975
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ISBN-13: 978-94-010-1675-9

e-ISBN-13: 978-94-010-1673-5

DOI: 10.1007/978-94-010-1673-5

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INTRODUCTION

In spite of its carefully planned – and fully justified – modesty, the title of this book might very well surprise more than one potential reader. It is not normal to see such controversial concepts as “Renaissance,” “Renaissance Thought,” “Spanish Renaissance,” or even “Spanish Thought” freely linked together in the crowded intimacy of one single printed line. The author of these essays is painfully aware of the complexity of the ground he has dared to cover. He is also aware that all the assumptions and connotations associated with the title of this book have been the subject of great controversy among scholars of high repute who claimed (and probably had) revealing insight into human affairs and ideas. That these pages have been written at all therefore needs some justification.

I am convinced that certain of the disputes among historians of ideas do not touch upon matters of substance, but rather reveal the taste and intellectual idiosyncracies of their authors. Much of the disagreement is, I think, a matter of aesthetics. Those who find special gratification in well-defined labels, clear-cut schemes, and comprehensive generalizations, can hardly bear the company of those who insist upon detail, complexity, and organic growth. The nightmarish dilemma, still unresolved, between Unity and Diversity, between the Universal and the Individual, haunts the History of Ideas. To have the best of both worlds (a typical Spanish attitude), I have resolved to use traditional labels, but to use them casually and with great flexibility. By “Renaissance,” therefore, I mean a noticeable quickening in the pace of cultural change toward the end of the fifteenth century, reaching to what one might be more inclined to call ‘Baroque,’ probably toward the early decades of the seventeenth century. Whether this ‘Renaissance’ signaled a ‘radical break’ with the so-called Middle Ages or not, is a matter of scarce interest to me. It all depends on what

is meant by the expression 'radical break;' the answers are likely to be different for each individual, for each nation, and for each decade.

What is of far greater interest to me is the old controversy about the significance of Philosophy during the Renaissance period. Philosophical prejudice prevents me from dogmatically believing that philosophical expression always follows the religious or artistic unfolding of the human mind. I am willing to concede, for instance, that Renaissance Philosophy was unequal to seventeenth or nineteenth century Philosophy in the novelty of its paradigms, in the comprehensiveness of its systematization, or in the accuracy of its technical idiom. But I cannot believe that man's artistic taste, political thought, economic structure, system of values, religious beliefs, and educational institutions can change as quickly as they did during the Renaissance without a matching upheaval in the world of ideas. Whether the new ideas caused those changes or were caused by them, is for dogmatic philosophers to decide on the basis of their grand premises and principles. The historian of ideas is busy enough exploring the winding path of human intellectual achievements. The inconclusive, latent, propeadeutic, transient, precursory, and protean character of Renaissance thought – fascinating as it is – makes this task much more difficult and the findings much more modest.

The central claim of my title is by far the most controversial, and probably the one most important to me. Of those who have no scruples in talking about 'the Renaissance' and who place special value upon intellectual history, only a small minority is willing to include Spain in their research. If the Renaissance is described as a movement of ideas which either secularized human existence or prepared it for the Reformation, Spain, obviously, does not easily qualify for further consideration. The four ensuing chapters attempt only to convey the impression that Spain had her full share in the vitality of Renaissance intellectual life; that, particularly during the reign of Charles V, and to a lesser extent under Philip II, she was still a lively partner in the community of European nations; that some of her achievements formed a relevant and influential aspect of European philosophical traditions; and, finally, that the intellectual ostracism of the centuries to follow was not the inevitable result of intellectual pauperism, but the regrettable consequence of religious and political censorship.

These chapters do not pretend to focus upon the greatest representatives of Spanish Renaissance thought. In fact they were chosen for practical and personal reasons of which the author is well aware and

the reader can comfortably ignore. Each one of them, however, in its own right, aims to draw attention to a different aspect of Spanish intellectual life in the sixteenth century. The first chapter does not actually deal with Renaissance thinkers, but rather with thinkers at whom Renaissance criticism was aimed. The second chapter discusses the origins of International Law and the thought of Francisco de Vitoria. In the third chapter we move on to the reign of Philip II, and present Fray Luis de León's philosophy of language. The last chapter deals with the naturalistic philosophy of man which inspired Juan Huarte's *Examen de Ingenios*. Throughout the book I have attempted to relate these past expressions of philosophical reflection to contemporary themes and concerns. As is the case with any book, this one was made possible by the help and generosity of many individuals and institutions. My wife presented me with a wonderful son between the completion of Chapters Two and Three. My daughter urged me to finish a book she knew I would dedicate to her. Professors Joseph Silverman and Richard Popkin helped me in many more ways than they themselves knew. Mrs. Joan Hodgson, of the Interlibrary Loan at Santa Cruz (University of California), kindly procured all the books and articles mentioned in the Bibliography. Mr. David Burkes, Mrs. Eveline Kanen, Mrs. Helen Smith, Ms. Kerstin Thule and Ms. Beth Beurkens edited the text with incredible patience. The University of California Administration made available the badly-needed research aid and leave of absence. But, mostly, it was a Senior Fellowship of the National Endowment for the Humanities which, toward the end, provided me with the time and the means to make the final effort.

Finally, I want to thank all the publishers who generously allowed me to quote part of their books: the *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* for the Spanish text of Juan Huarte's *Examen de Ingenios*; the Clarendon Press for the English translation of Francisco de Vitoria's *Relectiones*; the Gregg press for the text of Vives' *In Pseudo-Dialécticos*; the *Biblioteca de Teólogos Españoles* for the Latin text of Vitoria; the *Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos* for the Spanish original of Fray Luis de León; Herder Book Company for the English Translations of *De Los Nombres de Cristo*.