

THE CONCEPT OF «JUST WAR» IN
EL PRÍNCIPE CONSTANTE,
BY CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA

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El príncipe constante is a comedia by Pedro Calderón de la Barca composed around 1628. It is based on the attempt by Portugal in 1437 to conquer the city of Tangier in present-day Morocco. This was an effort to expand the 1415 conquest of Ceuta. In this play, as in history, the charge on Tangier is led by two Portuguese princes, Enrique and his younger brother Fernando. This attack ends in failure for the Portuguese, and Fernando remains in Africa as a bargaining chip for the Muslim King of Fez, who hopes to recover Ceuta. When Fernando refuses to be exchanged for Ceuta, the King of Fez enslaves him, leading to his eventual death¹. At a basic level, this literary work is cen-

¹ Ceuta is a bone of contention to this day between Muslims and Christians. As recently as November of 2007, there was an incident between King Mohammed VI of Morocco and King Juan Carlos I of Spain: the Muslim monarch expressed outrage concerning a two-day visit by the Spanish king to Ceuta and Melilla.

tered on the thoughts and consequent actions of Fernando², and their contrast with those of his brothers. The broader focus of the play is that of Christian motivations for engaging in war. In this study I will analyze the concept of 'just war' in light of the teachings of two pre-eminent theologians of the Golden Age, the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria and the Jesuit Francisco Suárez³. I will then compare the development of the character of Fernando with that of his brothers, in relation to the conflict with the Muslims. In the end, I hope to demonstrate that in this work Calderón emphasizes that 'just war' must begin in the heart.

Concerning the historical timeframe of *El príncipe constante*, the conquest of Ceuta marked the initiation of a period of expansion for Portugal, whose empire by 1571 would reach as far as Nagasaki on its eastern front. British historian J. H. Elliot states that Castile, like Portugal, «was inspired... by the crusading tradition, and the occupation of Ceuta in 1415 was itself conceived as part of a crusade which might one day encircle the earth and take Islam in the rear»⁴. However, this expansion was also in great part a search for a trade route to the East. This ambiguity of motives is displayed in the work studied.

A central element in the interpretation of *El príncipe constante* is the concept of «just war». Francisco de Vitoria (1485?-1546), known as the father of international law, contributed much to the study of warfare. Although Vitoria's lectures *On the Law of War* are a continuation of those *On the American Indians* (both published in 1539), his teachings on warfare can be applied to the studied work, which is based on conquests in Africa. In Question 1, Article 3 of his lecture on the Law of War, Francisco de Vitoria names five possible motivations for the initiation of war. Of these, the first three are unacceptable: «di-

² «En este drama la acción dramática se centra en la cuestión de la conducta del protagonista con respecto al conflicto entre los valores humanos y el plan divino» (Lumsden-Kouvel, 1983, p. 501).

³ The influence of these theologians on Calderón is unquestionable. He studied law in the University of Salamanca for three years (1616-1619). This university was the one at which Vitoria taught from 1526 to 1545. Vitoria's publication on the Laws of War was based on lectures given by him at this university. Calderón was also greatly influenced by the Jesuits. As a boy, he was a student at the Imperial School of the Jesuits (located in Madrid) for nine years.

⁴ Elliot, 1990, p. 57.

fference of religion»; «enlargement of empire»; and «the personal glory or convenience of the prince»⁵. These appear to be in large part the motivation of the Portuguese in this play to conquer Tangier, albeit under religious cover. The fourth motivation is the only one that is acceptable: «the sole and only just cause for waging war is when harm has been inflicted»⁶. (The fifth statement indicates that trivial offenses do not justify war.)

The views on «just war» of the preeminent Jesuit theologian and philosopher Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), a contemporary of Calderón, are found in the Charity portion of his lectures on Faith, Hope, and Charity (*Fide, Spe, et Charitate*, posthumously published in 1621). This work was compiled from his lectures at the University of Coimbra. In Disputation 13, Section 5 of his study on Charity, Suárez states what he views as four false grounds to launch a war: the refusal by the enemy to accept Christianity; avenging injuries done by the enemy to God through «sins against nature, and by idolatry»; a belief in «the supreme temporal dominion [of Christians over nonbelievers and their possessions]»; and a belief that «unbelievers are barbarians and incapable of governing themselves properly»⁷. In Section 6 of the same Disputation, Suárez concludes «that a Christian prince may not declare war save either by reason of some injury inflicted or for the defence of the innocent»⁸. Suárez's first motivation for just war is the same as the only just motivation proposed by Vitoria —war in response to injury inflicted. The second justification for the initiation of war —the defense of the innocent— is Suárez's alone⁹.

Under these standards, the Portuguese motivations in this play for carrying out the attack on Tangier are unacceptable. At the beginning of *El príncipe constante*, their supposed purpose of extending the Faith, though seemingly righteous, corresponds to one of the unjustified motivations listed by both Vitoria and Suárez: «difference of religion» (Vitoria) or «unbelief of the enemy» (Suárez). Concerning the Mus-

⁵ Vitoria, *Vitoria: Political Writings*, pp. 302–303.

⁶ Vitoria, *Vitoria: Political Writings*, p. 303.

⁷ Suárez, *Selections*, pp. 823–825.

⁸ Suárez, *Selections*, p. 826.

⁹ In Section 7 (p. 827) Suárez goes on to give several examples which would justify war—for example, when unbelieving rulers prevent their subjects who want to accept Christianity from doing so; or when such rulers harm believers.

lims, the initial mindset of the King of Fez is only partially acceptable. This is exposed in the first exchange between the King of Fez and General Muley, leader of his forces. The General speaks to the Muslim ruler concerning Ceuta, stating that «el paso a España te estorba»¹⁰. This indicates a desire on part of the King to recover Ceuta (justified as «war in response to injury inflicted»), but with the final purpose of conquering Spanish territory (which corresponds to Vitoria's «enlargement of empire»)¹¹. However, in the very same speech Muley convinces the King of the need to set aside those goals in order to defend Tangier against the Portuguese attack. Throughout the remainder of the play the Muslims are in a defensive mode, rather than offensive. This leaves the Christians as the aggressors (militarily speaking) for the remainder of *El príncipe constante*. The framework of this comedia is focused on the motivations for the Christian conquest of Muslim lands, not vice versa.

Of the three unacceptable motivations for warfare listed by Vitoria, all might be viewed as Portuguese justifications for the siege of Tangier. The first two («difference of religion» and «enlargement of the empire») are apparent, though not directly expressed. At their initial disembarkation, the first words of a Portuguese character come from Fernando's brother Enrique:

Yo he de ser el primero, África bella,
que he de pisar tu margen arenosa,
porque oprimida al peso de mi huella
sientas en tu cerviz la poderosa
fuerza que ha de rendirte. (vv. 459-463)

El príncipe constante concentrates on internal rather than external warfare. At this early stage, Fernando is emotionally ambiguous, man-

¹⁰ Calderón de la Barca, *El príncipe constante*, p. 89; v. 176. All quotations from this work will be from the 1996 edition by Cantalapiedra and Rodríguez López-Vázquez. The verse numbers of this edition will be listed in parentheses next to each quotation.

¹¹ It is historically true that Muslim rulers from northern Africa desired to conquer the Iberian Peninsula as the Almoravids and Almohads had done in previous centuries. However, the efforts of the Moroccan Muslims to occupy Spain were effectively brought to an end by Castilian and Portuguese forces at the Battle of Río Salado (1340).

ifesting both bravery and fear. As he disembarks, he falls to the ground and exclaims, «¡Válgame el cielo! / Hasta aquí los agüeros me han seguido» (vv. 465–466). Though this is frequently a theatrical bad omen, in this case it is a foreshadowing of his victory through humiliation¹².

Enrique immediately attempts to reverse Fernando's fear caused by what seems to be an ominous event. His words of encouragement appeal to Fernando's passion for territorial gains:

Pierde, Fernando, pierde ese recelo,
 porque el caer ahora antes ha sido
 que ya como señor la misma tierra
 los brazos en albricias te ha pedido. (vv. 467–470)

Shortly thereafter, Fernando instructs don Juan de Silva, Count of Miranda, to reconnoiter the land. Fernando states that «la he de ganar a sangre y fuego / que el campo inunde, el edificio encienda» (vv. 481–482). His thoughts of conquest temporarily align with those of his brother Enrique.

The third unacceptable motivation for war according to Vitoria («the personal glory or convenience of the prince») is absolutely central to the contrast made between Fernando's motivations, and those of his brothers Enrique and Duarte, and of his nephew Alfonso. Initially, Enrique displays seemingly good purposes, seeking the glory of God. In his response to Fernando's second expression of fear concerning bad omens, he shows a commendable mind frame:

esos agüeros viles, miedos vanos,
 para los moros vienen, que los crean,
 no para que los duden, los cristianos;
 nosotros dos los somos, no se emplean
 nuestras armas aquí por vanagloria
 de quien los libros inmortales lean
 ojos humanos esta gran victoria;
 la Fe de Dios a engrandecer venimos,

¹² Fernando's fall is reminiscent of the parable of Jesus in which a sower sows seeds (*Matthew*, 13, 1–9, 18–23). Only the seeds sown on good ground produce fruit.

suyo será el honor, suya la gloria,
y vivimos dichosos, si morimos. (vv. 514-523)

These words of Enrique appear righteous in that he does not seek personal glory. However, his desire to forcefully spread the Faith is not an acceptable motivation in the 'just war' teachings of neither Vitoria nor Suárez. Though the first Portuguese skirmish with the Moroccans is successful, Fernando is taken captive by the King of Fez in the second. This is a defeat in the temporal frame. At the end of the First Act, the King of Fez allows Enrique to return to Portugal to negotiate with King Duarte the exchange of Fernando for Ceuta. This initiates the internal struggle of the protagonist, Fernando.

Towards the exact midpoint of the Second Act as well as of the play, a sudden dramatic break occurs between Fernando and his brothers, not only in their physical location, but especially in their moral stance. In the first half of this Act, Fernando is treated well by the King of Fez. Nearly halfway through the Second Act, Fernando returns to Fez from Portugal with news of the death of King Duarte. He reads the will of Duarte, which begins with the following words, to the Muslim king:

En su testamento
el rey mi señor ordena
que luego por la persona
del infante se dé a Ceuta. (vv. 1296-1299)

This demand exposes the self-centered nature of the Portuguese royalty's territorial efforts. Fernando is enraged at the proposition and lengthily reprimands Enrique. His wrath is centered, not on the Muslim authorities, but on the Christian. To them, the rescue of a family member is of more importance than the protection of a city occupied by Christian subjects. Fernando equates the giving of churches to Muslims with giving them up to the devil (vv. 1379-1373). He expresses fear that the Catholics of Ceuta might abandon the Faith in order to retain their possessions under the Muslims (vv. 1384-1387). Fernando asks his brother, «¿Fuera bueno que murieran / hoy tantas vidas por una, / que no importa que se pierda?» (vv. 1397-1399). As he tears, casts to the ground, and eats the sheets of the will of Duarte, he declares himself a slave to the King of Fez rather than surrender

the now Christian city of Ceuta (vv. 1424-1425). The following words are central to his statement:

Cristianos, Fernando es muerto,
 Moros, un esclavo os queda,
 cautivos, un compañero
 hoy se añade a vuestras penas;
 cielos, un hombre restaura
 vuestras divinas iglesias. (vv. 1434-1439)

In great anger, the King of Fez casts Fernando to the ground, places his feet on him, and declares him his slave until the city of Ceuta is restored to him¹³.

During his captivity, Fernando displays the willingness to submit to a Muslim king in all things but those that contradict his faith¹⁴. As he nears death, he drags himself on the ground to the King of Fez in order to request merciful aid which conforms to Natural Law. As he offers to kiss the King's feet, the King asks him the cause of such obedience. He begins his response acknowledging the Muslim King's dominion over him:

Es mostrar
 cuánto debe respetar
 el vasallo a su señor,
 y pues tu esclavo soy
 y estoy en presencia tuya,
 esta vez tengo de hablarte,
 mi rey, mi señor, escucha. (vv. 2410-2415)

¹³ Historically speaking, the slavery to death of Prince Fernando was not his personal choice on behalf of Ceuta. While his humility and constancy are documented by his secretary, João Álvarez, the gradual and brutal death of Prince Fernando did not result from a personal decision. Instead, it was brought about by the Portuguese Cortes' refusal to ratify such an exchange.

¹⁴ Orders contrary to the Faith can come from Christian as well as non-Christian rulers. Fernando's humble recognition of the authority of a Muslim ruler excludes matters of faith (*i. e.* giving up Ceuta in exchange for his freedom). Earlier in the play, he displays much more indignation in his refusal to follow the instructions of his dead Christian brother —orders which correspond to the Muslim king's desires.

However, towards the end of his lengthy speech, Fernando asserts that he will remain firm in his faith regardless of his fate. His submission to death has some parallels to that of Christ before Roman governor Pilate. Pilate was no more of a Jewish authority than the King of Fez was Christian. Christ acknowledged the temporal lordship of Pilate and submitted to the pagan earthly governor to the point of death, but refused to deny his nature to save his life. At first glance, this appears to be a contradictory way to acquire lasting and absolute victory.

While in brutal captivity, Fernando undergoes a physical and spiritual metamorphosis. As his body degenerates, his inner man is transformed by his faith and faithfulness into a spiritual warrior of great stature¹⁵. Near death he makes a request of God that in the end will be granted: «pues yo os he dado a vos / tantas Iglesias, mi Dios, / alguna me habéis de dar» (vv. 2660-2662). Subsequently, King Alfonso, successor to the throne of his deceased father, Duarte, arrives and communicates to the King of Fez the message that many riches will be given to him in exchange for Fernando. However, should they not be accepted, the Portuguese will rescue him by force. The Muslim king reasserts his desire of nothing but Ceuta in exchange for the captive Portuguese prince, at which Alfonso departs declaring war on the Muslims. In the second confrontation, the Portuguese motivations correspond to both of the just ones proposed by Suárez: response to an injury inflicted, and the defense of the innocent. In spite of these theologically acceptable motives on behalf of their imprisoned brother, the background of the final attack of the play is dubious. This battle against the Muslim authorities of Morocco is the remedy to the bad results of the ambiguously motivated first attack. Alfonso, Enrique, and the Portuguese forces arrive to engage in war in a scene which immediately follows that of the death of Fernando. The words Alfonso addresses to a Fernando he cannot see display a decay in the royal thought patterns:

¹⁵ «Fernando's loyalty to his conscience, surviving the degradation, torture and death of his body, is the only victory there is in the whole play» (Parker, 1973, p. 454).

Fernando, si el martirio que padeces,
 pues es suya la causa, a Dios le ofreces,
 cierta está la victoria,
 mío será el honor, tuya la gloria. (vv. 2705-2708)

This corresponds to the wrong motive specified by Vitoria, *i. e.*, the personal glory of a prince. Fernando immediately responds from backstage: «Tu orgullo altivo yerra, / embiste, gran Alfonso, cierra, cierra» (vv. 2709-2710). Alfonso's assertion that honor will belong to him and glory to Fernando is in total contrast with the statement of Enrique in the First Act, declaring that the honor and glory would be for God¹⁶.

Not long after this exchange, the glorified Fernando appears on-stage: «Sale Don Fernando de gala, con manto de su orden de comulgar y una hacha encendida en la mano, en un bofetón por alto o por el tablado» (p. 199). This presents an image of the final exaltation of the humble. The perfect heart of the immortal Fernando is contrasted with the unstable heart of the mortal Alfonso. Even as he leads his brother in the defeat of the Muslims, Fernando must remind him of the need to give God all the glory in order to achieve a true victory: «y si es de Dios la gloria, / no digas "Guerra" ya, sino "Victoria"» (vv. 2739-2740).

The «victory» of the Portuguese at the end of *El príncipe constante* is quite hollow. Though it is based on the only just cause for war recognized by both Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez (retribution for major offenses), it is a result of Portugal's previous 'unjust' siege of Tangier. They obtain the abused corpse of Fernando, exposed to passersby after his death. Fernando, not his brothers, receives divine recognition through the dedication of a temple to him by his brother, King Alfonso. Close to the end of the play, Alfonso holds the hand of Fernando's corpse and states that «En un templo soberano / haré depósitos graves / de vuestro sagrado cuerpo» (vv. 2935-2937). This places on Fernando the stamp of divine approval. None of his brothers receives such divine recognition. Historically speaking, Prince

¹⁶ «La acción no encarna un triunfo del cristianismo sobre el islam, ni exalta el espíritu de cruzada religiosa. La guerra, en la que se mezclan motivos religiosos y ambiciones políticas, se presenta constantemente a una luz dudosa, dominada por la arrogancia y la vanagloria» (García Gómez, 2000, p. 130).

Fernando was beatified in 1470. The Portuguese conquered Tangier the following year.

In the work studied, Calderón uses an event from the history of Portugal (united with Spain at the time Calderón wrote this play) to address issues that remain to his time. In *El príncipe constante*, the great majority of characters from the Portuguese royal family do not live up to the tenets of Catholicism prevalent at the time of Calderón. In this play, the greatest enemies of Christianity are not the Muslims, but the Christians themselves. (Might this play be a criticism of the Thirty Years War ongoing at the time of its composition?). In the end, true victory must begin with godly motivations. Fernando, the genuine hero of *El príncipe constante*, gives up his life rather than surrender the Portuguese-held city of Ceuta. His will to submit to is not based on territorial loss, but on the loss of Christian subjects. Fernando's internal war against his interests and passions bears much greater results than the concurrent, self-interested conquest efforts of his family. In the end, motivation outweighs achievements.

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