

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Global Saint for the Modern World? The Transnational Campaign for the Canonization of Christopher Columbus

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Abstract

This article analyzes the history of the campaign for the canonization of Christopher Columbus in the nineteenth century, the reformulation of the models of sainthood and, more generally, discourses that tried to explain the role of Catholicism in the development of Western civilization. I argue that the campaign was conceived as an apology for the contribution of Catholicism to the birth of the modern world and had, from its origins, a marked anti-Protestant character. Although the idea for the campaign originated in France, this campaign was characterized by its strong transnational dimension, involving Catholics on both sides of the Atlantic. In this sense, promoting a saint between two continents had a geopolitical dimension, reinforcing Rome's connection with the Americas and, in particular, North America.

Keywords: Canonization; Catholic Church; Christopher Columbus; Civilization; The Americas; Anti-Protestantism

1. Introduction

On October 12, 2004, a group of supporters of President Hugo Chávez pulled down the Columbus statue in Plaza Venezuela, Caracas. Renaming it the *Day of Indigenous Resistance*, they symbolically put the sculpture on trial, condemned, torn down, dragged, vandalized, and hanged the accused for the crime of genocide.¹ One hundred and twelve years earlier, on August 7, 1892, another statue of Columbus was torn down by anticlerical forces on the Pincian Hill in Rome. On that occasion, the act was not premeditated, but rather the fortuitous outcome of clashes between clericals and anticlericals. It was not an antiracist protest portraying the Genoese mariner as genocidal, as would happen a little over a century later. It was, rather, the opposite: a struggle to appropriate the hero who had made what both groups considered the most important discovery in modern history and who had opened up a new world to civilization.

¹Daniel García Marco, “¿Dónde está la estatua de Cristóbal Colón que fue juzgada, condenada y colgada el 12 de octubre de 2004 en Caracas?,” *BBC Mundo*, accessed October 12, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37625519>.

That afternoon, under the banner of “Catholic Rome to Christopher Columbus,” different Catholic associations had left in a procession to the bust with the aim of laying a wreath and giving some speeches. When the news reached the liberal media, the anticlericals tried to prevent this tribute to the man they considered a hero of the Italian nation. When the catholic procession reached the monument, they found it covered with tricolor flags and surrounded by counterdemonstrators. When they tried to reach it, a scuffle broke out, which ended in blows, the banner torn, the effigy of Columbus knocked down, and the demonstration broken up by the authorities.

The confrontation was front-page news in the Catholic media in the days that followed. Editorials labeled the protesters a “Jewish-Masonic sect” and recalled a previous attempt in 1881 to throw the corpse of Pius IX into the Tiber as it was being transferred to the Basilica of Saint Lawrence outside the Walls.² What is more, they pointed the finger at the civil authorities, who, although aware of the counterdemonstration, did nothing to prevent it. The Secretary of State complained bitterly to the nuncio in Madrid about the attitude of the liberal press that justified the disturbances and about “how violent and abnormal the situation created for the Church and its Head in Rome is.”³

Beyond this Italian national interpretation, the truth is that Catholic circles had long claimed the figure of Christopher Columbus. In the mid-nineteenth century, Catholics began an impressive campaign to canonize the Genoese mariner, which had the support of hundreds of prelates, associations, and so forth. Although this movement was unsuccessful and remains practically forgotten today, the truth is that it constitutes a privileged lens from which to understand some of the dynamics of nineteenth-century Catholicism. Thus, among other things, the campaign in favor of canonizing Columbus allows us to observe how Catholics tried to find, in the past, elements that would explain Catholicism’s role in the birth of modernity.

With the exception of a few scarce and often merely anecdotal references, the movement to canonize Columbus has fallen into oblivion today. However, there was a time during which it sparked heated debates. Authors in France, Italy, Spain, Uruguay, Argentina, and many other countries dedicated thousands of pages to this question, and the campaign was viewed favorably by Pius IX, its instigator, and Leo XIII, his successor, who came to promote the religious celebrations of the Fourth Centenary of the discovery of the Americas. Nearly a century after the campaigns began and failed, they could still captivate writers of stature like Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier. In his novel *El Arpa y la Sombra* (The Harp and the Shadow, 1978), he addressed the canonization of Columbus in order to reflect on the importance of his discovery of the Americas for the world as a whole and, especially, for Catholicism.⁴

II. Politics of Sanctity, Politics of the Past

The Columbus campaign took place against the backdrop of a period marked by the growing importance of sainthood policies. During Pius IX’s papacy, Catholicism reached

²*La voce della verità*, 181, August 9, 1892.

³Draft of a letter from the Secretary of State to the Nuncio in Madrid, August 11, 1892, Nunziatura di Madrid, caja 552, tit. II, rub. II, sez. I, n° 53, folios 118–122, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (hereafter AAV).

⁴Carpentier’s novel drew inspiration from several sources, including *Le Révélateur du Globe* (Revealer of the Globe, 1884) by the polemicist and renowned writer of his age, Léon Bloy, and the experimental play *Le Livre de Christophe Colomb* (The Book of Christopher Columbus, 1933) by the French dramatist and poet, Paul Claudel. Javier Mompó Valor, “El arpa y la sombra: procesos intertextuales en la construcción del personaje de Cristóbal Colón,” *América Sin Nombre* 9, no. 10 (2006): 139–47.

a new milestone with the record number of canonizations of fifty-two new saints and 222 beatifications, a number only surpassed in the twentieth century by Paul VI and John Paul II. These processes highlighted the connection of the new saints with the defense of the primacy of the papacy and the integrity of dogma at a time when Catholicism felt besieged on several fronts. Likewise, they also served to reinforce the global dimension of the Catholic Church by remembering Catholics who lost their lives in the farthest reaches of the world.⁵

Nevertheless, this universal outlook did not result in an active canonization policy extending beyond Europe. In this regard, it is worth recalling that, until the canonization of the Mexican martyr St. Philip of Jesus in 1862, the only saint born on the American continent was St. Rose of Lima. This history thus reflects not only a series of unsuccessful causes – as illustrated by the Mexican case – but also a belated engagement by the United States and Canadian episcopates, which did not initiate canonization processes until the 1880s.⁶

Works about sainthood barely dedicate a sentence to the process of canonizing Columbus, and few specifically address this movement. The historian Consuelo Varela diminishes its importance by noting that the process was never formally initiated. There is only one file on the matter in the Congregation of Saints, with several letters that arrived in Rome requesting the opening of the process, and, after Consuelo Varela, this is due to the fact that the campaign had little support and was rooted in poor arguments.⁷

There are a few isolated studies that attempt to reconstruct the canonization process and that, in order to do so, turn mostly to printed sources.⁸ More recently, Matthew Restall has adopted a noteworthy approach grounded in a critical analysis of the arguments advanced in support of canonization. Although his work does not focus directly on the campaign itself, it offers valuable insights into how it unfolded in the United States.⁹

Furthermore, the lens of these works is skewed by knowledge that the campaign failed, and they are, therefore, unable to underscore the importance of the canonization of Columbus within the broader defense of Catholicism at a moment when the Catholic Church's role in modern society was continually being questioned and when it was seen as an obstacle to progress and scientific development. I intervene in this work by

⁵Stefan Samerski 'Wie im Himmel so auf Erden?': Selig- und Heiligsprechung in der Katholischen Kirche 1740–1870 (Kohlhammer, 2002); and Benoit Pellistrandi, "De la «acción de los católicos» a la santidad laical: el historiador frente a la santidad contemporánea," *Anuario de historia de la Iglesia* 13 (2004): 105–28.

⁶For the Mexican case, see Antonio Rubial García, *La santidad controvertida: hagiografía y conciencia criolla alrededor de los venerables no canonizados de Nueva España* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999). At the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884), the U.S. bishops promoted the cause of the young Mohawk woman Catherine Tekakwitha. See Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own: How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁷Consuelo Varela, *Cristóbal Colón, Retrato de un hombre* (Alianza, 1992), 189–94; and Consuelo Varela, "La supuesta causa de beatificación de Cristóbal Colón," in *Strenae Emmanuetae Marrero Oblatae* (Universidad de La Laguna, 1993).

⁸Giovanni Odoardi, "Il proceso di beatificazione di Cristoforo Colombo," in *Studi colombiani (Civico Istituto Colombiano, 1952)*, vol. III, 261–272; Titus Heydenreich, "Christoph Columbus - ein Heiliger? Politische und religiöse Wertungsmotive im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Columbus 1892/1992: Heldenverehrung und Heldendemontage*, ed. Gerhard Wawor and Titus Heydenreich (Vervuert, 1995); and Alfonso Marini Dettina, "Suppliche per la canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo," in *Atti del II Congresso Colombiano* (CESCOM, 2006), 659–72.

⁹Matthew Restall, *The Nine Lives of Christopher Columbus* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2025).

showing that supporters of canonization used the campaign to explain Catholicism's contribution to the birth of the modern world, and, alongside that, to legitimize its role in the present and its ability to shape the future by guiding orderly progress under moral principles.

While the canonization campaign has been virtually ignored by historians specializing in the politics of the past and the invention of national symbols surrounding the figure of Columbus, the Genoese sailor sparked both enthusiastic praise and heated debates about his biography and his links to various national and imperial projects in nineteenth-century public discourse. Among the most controversial issues were his place of birth and the location of his remains, as the appearance of a coffin bearing the name of Christopher Columbus in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in 1877 called into question the transfer of his remains to Havana in 1795.¹⁰

In the majority of nineteenth-century accounts, Christopher Columbus is portrayed as the figure who most contributed to the birth of the modern world. The work of Washington Irving played a central role in shaping this narrative, reinventing Columbus following “the model of the North American ‘self-made man’ who could do good for others by doing well for himself.” Irving transformed him into “a solitary genius and entrepreneur carrying European civilization over new frontiers to uncharted lands resonated well with the aspirations of a young country.”¹¹ The American writer thus detached the discovery from any Christian mission and transformed it into an accidental discovery that had contributed to the development of civilization and trade. Finally, Irving's work reinforced the American interpretation of Columbus's biography, which sought to establish a connection between the birth of the United States and European modernity. In 1792, the United States alone celebrated the 300th anniversary of Europe's discovery of the Americas, and the first monument dedicated to Christopher Columbus was erected in Baltimore.¹²

Irving's *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, published in 1828, was a spectacular success, with 116 editions and reprints in the first 80 years and translations into other European languages (French in 1828 and Spanish in 1834). In 1829, a very popular abridged version appeared, which was used in schools and universities. Irving's work became the standard biography of Columbus, even in Spain, a country that Irving criticized for mistreating Columbus.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the United States, Spain, and Genoa (later Italy) claimed the charismatic figure of Columbus. His homeland took the lead with the inauguration of the first monument dedicated to Columbus in Europe, erected in Genoa's Piazza Acquaverde in 1846. In Spain, several monuments were erected, from the statue in the General Palace in Havana in 1862 and the one erected in the hall of the Ministry of Overseas Affairs in 1863, to the monuments in Cartagena (1883), Madrid (1886), Barcelona (1888), Las Palmas de Gran Canarias, Granada, and Salamanca (1892). Streets,

¹⁰David Marcilhacy, “Cristóbal Colón, un héroe hispanizado. Controversia en torno a su patria de origen y homenajes monumentales,” in *Construir España. Nacionalismo español y procesos de nacionalización*, ed. Javier Moreno Luzón (Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2007), 153–82.

¹¹Rolena Adorno, “Washington Irving's Romantic Hispanism and its Columbian Legacies,” in *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, ed. Richard L. Kagan (University of Illinois Press, 2002), 49–105, 53.

¹²Dennis Matthew, “The Eighteenth-Century Discovery of Columbus: The Columbian Tercentenary (1792) and the Creation of American National Identity,” in *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, ed. William Pencak et al., (Penn State University Press, 2002), 206–28.

squares, and neighborhoods were dedicated to Columbus, and various conferences and exhibitions were held to praise his figure.¹³

Between 1876 and 1915, the United States' attitude toward Columbus changed. The prominence of the Hispanic past diminished as greater emphasis was placed on the heritage associated with the Mayflower Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock.¹⁴ At the same time, the celebration of the Genoese sailor mutated into a symbol expressing Italian and Irish immigrant Catholic identities in a period defined by anti-Catholic nativism.¹⁵ Spanish authors, especially after the controversy surrounding Columbus's remains, decided to divert attention away from Columbus to emphasize the role of Spanish actors in the discovery, such as the Pinzón brothers. However, as could be seen during the celebrations of the Discovery of America, Columbus continued to play a central role in the commemorations in Madrid and Chicago.

III. The French Origins of the Canonization

Although Columbus most likely never set foot on French soil, French Catholics first proposed the idea to elevate his figure to the altars. In order to explain this paradox, one should, in the first instance, highlight the important role played by France as a laboratory for nineteenth-century Catholicism in its reconquest of the modern world. After Rome, Paris and Lyons were the most important seats of religious congregations and missions. France also had important educational centers for the clergy, a highly mobilized lay sector, and multiple Catholic publishing projects. They all promoted a renewal of devotional cultures and fostered an idealized vision of medieval Christianity through novels, neo-Gothic buildings, and so on. Yet, above all, France was a center of experimentation in which to combine Catholicism with romanticism, liberalism, and social teaching.¹⁶

Second, the support for an idea of Latinity that encompassed the countries of southern Europe and Latin America to confront the rise of the British Empire and the "Anglo-Saxon" race also played a very important role in promoting the canonization campaign in France. Indeed, it would appear that the first references to the Latin nature of the Americas can be found in the work of the French Saint-Simonian, Michel Chevalier.

¹³Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 53–95.

¹⁴Mary Elizabeth Boone, "The Spanish Element in Our Nationality": *Spain and America at the World's Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876–1915* (Penn State University Press, 2019).

¹⁵Bénédicte Deschamps, "Italian-Americans and Columbus Day: A Quest for Consensus between National and Group Identities, 1840–1910," in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation. American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach (Berghahn Books, 2001), 124–39; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995); Timothy Kubal, *Cultural Movements and Collective Memory. Christopher Columbus and the Rewriting of the National Origin Myth* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Marie-Christine Michaud, *Columbus Day et les Italiens de New York* (Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2011).

¹⁶On Paris as a Catholic capital, see Jacques-Olivier Boudon, "Être chrétien dans une ville déchristianisée: Paris au XIX^e siècle," in *Les Chrétiens dans la ville*, ed. Jacques-Olivier Boudon and Françoise Thelamon (Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2006), 281–95; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Paris capitale religieuse sous le Second Empire* (Cerf, 2001); Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign, 1848–1853* (Oxford University Press, 1986); and Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France's Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of a Modern Faith* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

He was the diplomatic representative of the government of Adolphe Thiers in the United States and Mexico, who juxtaposed the notion of a Latin race with that of the Anglo-Saxons in 1836. The notion of Latinity would soon be associated with Catholicism in contrast to Anglo-Saxon Protestant England and America.¹⁷

In 1845, Count Roselly de Lorgues published his *La croix dans les deux mondes ou la Clef de la connaissance* (The Cross in the Two Worlds or the Key to Knowledge). This journalist and French noble, who had already won a Legion of Honor Cross for his defense of the Catholic Church in *Le Christ devant le siècle* (Christ before the century, 1837), introduced a new defense of the idea that Catholicism had contributed to the general development of civilization at a time when it was facing mounting criticism as a hindrance to progress. Much of his work was dedicated to underscoring the “saintliness of Christopher Columbus.” For Lorgues, “the discovery of the Americas was the spontaneous fruit of Catholicism, and strictly the work of Faith. It was none other than the Catholic genius who revealed the existence of the other hemisphere.”¹⁸ Columbus was not just a fortunate seafarer, but, above all, “a perfect Christian; in addition to being the most skilled geographer of his time, he was also a naturalist without knowing it, a poet without wanting to be, a squadron leader, an astronomer, an administrator, a head of government, and, in addition, the greatest sailor who ever existed.”¹⁹

Roselly de Lorgues’s work became one of the major milestones of mid-nineteenth century Catholic apologetics. The book fell into the hands of Pius IX, who saw in Columbus an opportunity to vindicate Catholic civilization in the modern world.²⁰ In December 1851, the pope released a brief in which he emphasized how the Holy See had been involved in Columbus’s enterprise from the very beginning. In addition, Pius IX encouraged Roselly de Lorgues to write a biography of the Genoese mariner that was subsequently published in two volumes in 1856. Lorgues wrote a critique of what he considered to be a Protestant appropriation of the figure, as well as against those calumnies that had deformed the eminently Catholic nature of Columbus’s enterprise.²¹ In another papal brief dated April 24, 1863, the pope reaffirmed the spiritual nature of Columbus’s mission and strengthened the symbolic connection of the center of Christianity with the Americas. Accordingly, rather than a quest to add lands to the Spanish Empire, the brief claimed the expedition was intended to convert the entire continent to Christianity.²²

Despite his interest, Pius IX remained unsure about canonizing Columbus, an idea that had been put forward by Lorgues and his Italian translator, Tullio Dandolo, in 1856. However, he did not directly oppose the idea and, at a private audience in 1856, he told

¹⁷On these debates, see a recent examination in Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, “The Creation of a Latin American Catholic Church. Vatican Authority and Political Imagination (1854–1899),” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71 (2020): 316–36.

¹⁸Félix Roselly de Lorgues, *La croix dans les deux mondes ou la Clef de la connaissance* (Paris: L-F. Hivert, 1845), 436.

¹⁹Félix Roselly de Lorgues, *La croix dans les deux mondes ou la Clef de la connaissance* (Paris: L-F. Hivert, 1845), 437.

²⁰Henry Vignaud, “L’ancienne et la nouvelle campagne pour la canonization de Christophe Colomb,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 6 (1909): 17–44.

²¹Roselly de Lorgues, *Christophe Colomb, Histoire de sa vie et de ses voyages* (Paris: Didier et cie., 1856).

²²Giuseppe Baldi, *La glorificazione del genio cristiano. Sentimenti dell’episcopado e postulazione inédita di monsignor Rocco Cocchia a sua santità Leone XIII* (Genoa: Tip. Delle Letture Cattoliche, 1879), 9.

Lorgues and Dandolo, “it is true that it is not forbidden to try: *Tentare non nocet*.”²³ The following year, Lorgues wrote to Pius IX to tell him that he was increasingly convinced of Columbus’s saintliness, while pointing out the difficulties that emerged in the Congregation of Rites and the need to approach the process in an exceptional way. To achieve this, he appealed to Pius IX, the “first pope to cross the Atlantic” in the Muzi mission to Chile in 1824.²⁴

Support for canonization began to grow within the Catholic Church. On July 1, 1857, the Theatine, Ventura di Raulica, published a manifesto to the Italian clergy. Raulica began with a complaint about the absence of Catholic writers in addressing the history of Columbus, as opposed to histories written by Protestant authors like Washington Irving or Alexander von Humboldt. He therefore applauded the publication of Lorgues’s work and sought to make it known to the general public, as it revealed the true nature of Columbus:

a true saint, for outside the Heroes of the Gospel whom the Church honors with the worship and the name of Saints or Blessed, there has perhaps not been a Christian more inflamed with the love of Jesus Christ, more penetrated by the spirit of Christianity, and more sincerely devoted to the Apostolic See. Therefore, if it is sometimes permissible to give by similarity, by emphasis of language, the title of ‘Saint’ to a Christian whom the Church has not canonized, this title certainly belongs to the Messenger of Heaven, to the Angel, to the Apostle who carried the Cross to the New World.²⁵

The Primate and archbishop of Bordeaux, Ferdinand Donnet, took up the initiative to send a letter to the pope in which he called for an exceptional procedure to consider the cause for canonization. He accused “anti-Catholic writers” of appropriating the discovery of the New World and praised Lorgues’s work for restoring the discovery to the Church as “the triumph of Catholic inspiration.”²⁶ Likewise, Donnet presented Columbus as a Christian hero who encompassed theological virtues, who “was patient, chaste, austere, merciful. He practiced humility, obedience, resignation, the forgiveness of offences.”²⁷ Lastly, Donnet justified the request coming from Bordeaux, pointing out that this French city “has so many interests linked to the New World, and includes the bishoprics of the Antilles in its metropolitan see,” and was linked to Spain.²⁸

Conscious of the limitations inherent to the process following the rulings of Benedict XIV, such as the lack of witnesses, regularly proven miracles and worship, and the impossibility of an investigation by the local bishop, Donnet argued for an exceptional process for an exceptional man. Due to the cause’s importance, it could not be confined to

²³Roselly de Lorgues, *Della vita di Cristoforo Colombo, e delle ragioni di chiederne la beatificazione* (Prato: Ranieri Guasti, 1878), 26–7; and Giuseppe Baldi, *Il voto dell’episcopato cattolico per la glorificazione del genio cristiano. Adesioni episcopali alla causa del servo di Dio, Cristoforo Colombo* (Genoa: Tip. Delle Lettere Cattoliche, 1880), 90.

²⁴Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to pope Pius IX, June 25, 1866, Fondo Q (II), 106, V Cartella, 5, Archivio della congregazione delle Cause dei Santi (hereafter ACCS).

²⁵Reproduced in Roselly de Lorgues, *Cristoforo Colombo, Storia della sua vita e dei suoi viaggi* (Volpato e Comp. Editori, 1857), vol. II, 478.

²⁶*Lettera a SS: Pio IX di S. Eminenza il cardinale Donnet* (Marseille: s.l., 1866), 6.

²⁷*Lettera a SS: Pio IX di S. Eminenza il cardinale Donnet* (Marseille: s.l., 1866), 8.

²⁸*Lettera a SS: Pio IX di S. Eminenza il cardinale Donnet* (Marseille, 1866), 9.

a diocese, a religious order, or a country; it would, instead, have to be universal. To prove the need to elevate Columbus to the altars, Donnet argued that, “for the first time since the foundation of the Congregation of Rites, we have seen proud science, materialistic philosophy, which is today positivism or the school of independent morality, mobilize against the introduction of a cause for Beatification.”²⁹ In conclusion, he justified beginning the process on account of the fact that “most civilized peoples erect monuments or statues to Christopher Columbus, to honor his courage, his constancy, his human virtues,” and the Catholic Church must “reward the heavenly virtues of this hero of the Gospel.”³⁰ The canonization of Columbus was advanced specifically with the goal of combating positivism and Protestantism, making use of a figure who was beginning to be highly valued at this time.

Some prelates, such as the bishop of Orleans, Félix Dupanloup, and the archbishop of Burgos, Fernando de la Puente, wrote letters congratulating Donnet.³¹ Others copied Donnet’s example and wrote directly to the pope. Among the latter, André Charvaz, the archbishop of Genoa, Columbus’s birthplace, stood out. Charvaz followed Donnet’s line in asking for the establishment of an exceptional path toward canonization. Moreover, he pointed out that it would be a blessing for the faithful of the diocese and, especially, “for all sailors, to whom he would thus provide a glorious patron saint,” the “first apostle of the Americas.”³² Charvaz’s request included a collective petition from the faithful of Liguria that mentioned the connection between the Americas, the pope, and navigators: “the glorification of Christopher Columbus would be the triumph of Catholicism. It would exert an immense influence on sailors and would at the same time fulfil the wish of all pious souls, for it is the general wish in our country that the heroic Discoverer of the New World receive his reward from the first pope who crossed the Ocean and saw that new land, conquered by faith.”³³

The petition gained strength, and other prelates joined in supporting its goal.³⁴ However, there were also powerful opponents of the idea, including Abbé Angelo Sanguinetti, a historian and teacher at the Diocesan Seminary of Genoa. He had already published *Vita di Cristoforo Colombo* (The Life of Christopher Columbus, 1846), inspired in part by Washington Irving’s work. Lorgues complained bitterly that Sanguinetti’s version had been the most widely disseminated biography in Rome and that it was the story of a hero, but not that of a saint. In addition to other considerations – including the absence of sustained devotion over more than three centuries – Sanguinetti also questioned the validity of Columbus’s alleged marriage to Beatriz, showing that Lorgues misinterpreted these documents. Thus, although Sanguinetti extolled the navigator’s virtues, this aspect of Columbus’s personal life emerged as an insurmountable obstacle.³⁵

²⁹ *Lettera a SS. Pio IX di S. Eminenza il cardinale Donnet* (Marseille, 1866), 15.

³⁰ *Lettera a SS. Pio IX di S. Eminenza il cardinale Donnet* (Marseille, 1866), 22.

³¹ Roselly de Lorgues, *Aux Pères du Concile Œcuménique l’historien de Christophe Colomb, comte Roselly de Lorgues* (Genoa, 1870), 22–3.

³² Letter from archbishop of Genoa André Charvaz to pope Pius IX, Mai 8, 1867, Fondo Q (II), 106, V Cartella, 9, ACCS.

³³ “Supplica dei cattolici della Liguria al Santo Padre per l’introduzione della causa di beatificazione di Cristoforo Colombo,” Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, Anno 1900 rubbrica 18. Fasc. 1, AAV.

³⁴ Letter from Bishop of Rodez to Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, July 1, 1867, Fondo Q (II), 106, V Cartella, ACCS.

³⁵ Angelo Sanguinetti, *La canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo* (Genoa: Tipografia del R. Istituto Sordomuti, 1875). On the discussion about the marriage of Columbus, see Restall, *The Nine Lives of Christopher Columbus*.

At the same time, important opponents to canonization existed within the Roman Curia. These included Domenico Bartolini, Secretary (since 1861) and Prefect (since 1878) of the Congregation of Rites, who was in charge of canonization processes; the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Alessandro Barnabo; and the Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura, Carlo Sacconi.³⁶

In the face of the impending opening of the First Vatican Council, the first ecumenical gathering since Trent in 1563, Lorgues prepared a text for the prelates gathered in Rome, urging the pope to initiate the process.³⁷ Lorgues started with the idea that it was no coincidence that this initiative was being encouraged during the papacy of Pius IX, since he was “the first of the successors of Saint Peter to think about the Atlantic and visit the New Continent.”³⁸ Lorgues then defended Catholicism’s contribution to civilization, reclaiming Columbus as a Catholic hero, praising his Christian virtues and pointing out how the mission had been guided by Catholicism: “No man has rendered services to the Church and to civilization equal to his in scope, duration, and infinite growth.”³⁹ Against the hero had emerged “slanders,” hatched since the time of the Catholic Monarchs, and the “lies” reproduced in the work of the Protestant Washington Irving, as well as, more recently, Sanguineti’s work. Lorgues believed these efforts would fail: “In vain do Protestantism and lack of faith try to attribute it [Columbus’s discovery of the Americas] to the meditations of genius and to the progress of navigation. This enterprise, conceived under the auspices of the Holy Trinity, favored by the Church, was carried out in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰

The lack of a local bishop from his place of death was not an impediment; rather, it became a virtue. In other words, Columbus became a saint for seafarers and the ocean, which covers more than two-thirds of the Earth’s surface. The atmosphere for canonization was becoming favorable. The Spanish magazine *La Cruz* reported on the process, which was “taking on great proportions,” and which counted on the support of prelates from all over the world: “in the two Americas, and even including in Russia, public opinion shows its sympathy for this supreme tribute to such a great genius.”⁴¹

Lorgues sent his request to Cardinal Luigi Bilio. A central figure in the Vatican Council, Bilio was a consultant to the Universal Congregation of the Inquisition and had contributed to the drafting of the Syllabus of Errors. He had even been considered as a potential successor to Pius IX upon his death. The proposal would be included in a list of items to be addressed by the Council.⁴² Concurrently, in June 1870, at the Santa Maria Sopra Minerva Dominican convent, Cardinal Donnet himself drew up the *postulatum* that would be signed by ten cardinals and sixty-six archbishops and bishops.⁴³ However, Lorgues’s and Donnet’s initiatives would be interrupted by the fall of Rome on September 20, 1870, and the *sine die* closure of the First Vatican Council.

³⁶In a letter dated 19 June 1869 to Félix Dupanloup, Roselly de Lorgues detailed this opposition. ‘Lettres adressées à Mgr Dupanloup’ NAF 24705, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

³⁷Lorgues, *Aux Pères du Concile Œcuménique l’historien de Christophe Colomb*.

³⁸Lorgues, *Aux Pères du Concile Œcuménique l’historien de Christophe Colomb*, 3.

³⁹Lorgues, *Aux Pères du Concile Œcuménique l’historien de Christophe Colomb*, 8.

⁴⁰Lorgues, *Aux Pères du Concile Œcuménique l’historien de Christophe Colomb*, 10–11.

⁴¹*La Cruz* (1870), vol. II, 121.

⁴²Concilio Vaticano I, Acta congregationis pro postulatis, 166–LIII, AAV.

⁴³Giovanni Odoardi, “Il proceso di beatificazione di Cristoforo Colombo”, in *Studi colombiani* (Civico Istituto Colombiano, 1952), vol. III, 261.

IV. A Franciscan Saint?

Lorgues revived the canonization process in 1874 with the publication of *L'ambassadeur de Dieu et Pie IX* (The Ambassador of God and Pius IX). Throughout the work, Lorgues portrayed the pope as the driving force behind encouraging the explorations of Columbus and as a firm supporter of the initiation of the process.⁴⁴ Given that it was a moment when the pope was enjoying great personal popularity and that signs of global support for the papacy were multiplying following the conquest of Rome in 1870, there could not have been a more favorable context in which to link the cause to Pius IX.⁴⁵

Following Lorgues's publication, the magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* dedicated two extensive articles to promoting Columbus's canonization. The magazine's support for the Society of Jesus, interpreter of the pope's will and guardian of Catholic orthodoxy, would be decisive. The first article described the origins and course of the transnational campaign to colonize Columbus, pointing out how it began at a time when Catholicism felt besieged.⁴⁶ The second article presented Columbus as a devout and pious person, highlighting his ties to the Franciscans and his devotion to Mary. The article concluded by stating that, even if the goal of canonization was ultimately unsuccessful, the process would have beneficial effects for Catholicism and the papacy:

Perhaps the most widespread evidence of Columbus' Christian heroism motivated several of our venerable bishops to join the nomination of the most eminent Cardinal archbishop of Bordeaux. In any event, religion and public edification will benefit; and the enemies of Catholicism and the Papacy among us will be confounded, seeing that the revealer of the globe and discoverer of the new world was a very unusual man of humble faith, apostolic zeal, and boundless devotion to the authority of the Church and its Head, the Roman Pontiff.⁴⁷

The accidental discovery of a box with human remains bearing the name of Christopher Columbus in the inscription in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic in 1877 was particularly important in this part of the process. An altercation ensued between the Dominican and Spanish authorities when a critical report by Antonio López Prieto, who had been sent by the Spanish Royal Academy of History to analyze the discovery, became known. In response, Roque Cocchia, archbishop of Sirace and the Vatican representative in Santo Domingo, published *Los restos de Cristóbal Colón en la catedral de Santo Domingo* (The remains of Christopher Columbus in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo), in which he not only defended the discovery but also the saintliness of Columbus.⁴⁸ In the book, and following Lorgues's studies, he also came down squarely in favor of canonizing Columbus.⁴⁹ The fact that the discovery of the remains was connected with the canonization process led both Lorgues and Giuseppe Baldi, an Italian

⁴⁴Roselly de Lorgues, *L'Ambassadeur de Dieu et le pape Pie IX* (Plon, 1874), 8.

⁴⁵A recent overview of this global mobilization in Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, "The Roman Question in Latin America: Italian Unification and the Development of a Transatlantic Ultramontane Movement," *Atlantic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2021): 129–48.

⁴⁶"Istanze per la causa bella canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo," *Civiltà cattolica*, Serie IX, Vol. VII, fasc. 6, August 24, 1875, 513.

⁴⁷"Della Santità di Cristoforo Colombo," *Civiltà cattolica*, Serie IX, Vol. VII, fasc. 6, August 24, 1875, 705.

⁴⁸Roque Cocchia, *Los restos de Cristóbal Colón en la catedral de Santo Domingo, contestación al informe de la Real Academia de la Historia al gobierno de S.M. el Rey de España* (Imprenta de García Hermanos, 1879), 139.

⁴⁹Roque Cocchia, *Los restos de Cristóbal Colón en la catedral de Santo Domingo, contestación al informe de la Real Academia de la Historia al gobierno de S.M. el Rey de España* (Imprenta de García Hermanos, 1879), 139.

businessman, to support Cocchia's hypothesis that Columbus's remains lay in the Dominican Republic.

Nevertheless, this ultimately implied a significant hindrance to the campaign's spread in Spain. The historians of the Spanish Royal Academy of History took up positions against Lorgues and his Dominican Republic thesis.⁵⁰ Lorgues's harshest critic was one of the most important intellectuals of National Catholicism, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo. In a historiographical assessment of Christopher Columbus published in 1892, he described Lorgues as a "fanatical charlatan," and his work a "fanciful biography, written to the taste of worldly devotees and the knights-errant of French legitimism."⁵¹ Despite his success, "only in Spain has Roselly made few proselytes, even among those who, given his ideas, would seem to be more benevolent to him. Here, it is a bad thing, as Mr. Roselly would say, to speak ill of the Catholic King [Ferdinand II]."⁵² The cause was promoted primarily within French and Italian Catholic circles, thereby minimizing the risk of national rivalries between Spain and Italy in the canonization process.⁵³

The Franciscans played an important role during this second phase. As early as 1861, Emile Deschanel had criticized Lorgues's biography of Columbus, calling it "strange, bizarre, and somewhat insane." In contrast to the historical Columbus and his legend, Deschanel blamed Lorgues for inventing a new narrative of Columbus based on his belonging to the Franciscan tertiary order.⁵⁴ Lorgues defended the role of the Franciscans in the discovery and later evangelization of the Americas. He highlighted the importance of the Franciscan Monastery of La Rábida and the friars Juan Pérez and Antonio de Marchena in the development of Columbus's project and, above all, his membership in the Franciscan tertiary order.

Lorgues's interpretation then began to gain acceptance in the Franciscan order. Brother Félix de Cantalice (de Prades) wrote an article on the Franciscans as a source of inspiration for the discovery of the Americas.⁵⁵ In Spain, the Franciscan order favored canonizing Columbus. The historian, provincial minister of the Franciscans in Catalonia, and editor of the *Revista franciscana*, Ramón Buldú, published an article claiming to have found a document in a Valencian library that would prove Columbus's marriage to Beatriz Enríquez. This would remove the final obstacle to canonization: the suspicion of concubinage.⁵⁶

Other Franciscans, including Marcellino da Civezza, who translated Lorgues into Italian, and the archbishop of Aquila, joined the campaign for Columbus's canonization.⁵⁷ All this

⁵⁰Cesáreo Fernández 'Duro, "Los calumniadores del servidor de Dios, Cristóbal Colón', obra póstuma del conde Roselly de Lorgues," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 34 (1899): 304–11.

⁵¹Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, "De los historiadores de Colón con motivo de un libro reciente," *El Centenario: Revista ilustrada* (Madrid, 1892–1893), vol. II, 433–54, 437.

⁵²Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, "De los historiadores de Colón con motivo de un libro reciente," *El Centenario: Revista ilustrada* (Madrid, 1892–1893), vol. II, 64.

⁵³On this type of national rivalry, see the disputes between U.S. and Canadian bishops discussed in Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own: How the Quest for a Holy Hero Helped Catholics Become American*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁵⁴*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, August 8, 1861; Emile Dechanel, *Christophe Colomb* (Paris, 1862), 249.

⁵⁵Félix de Cantalice (de Prades), "Christophe Colomb Franciscain," *Annales franciscaines* (1863–1865), vol II, 555–60, 557.

⁵⁶*El Tiempo*, October 31, 1876. Buldú published the documents as an appendix to Roselly de Lorgues, *Monumento a Colón. Historia de la vida y viajes de Cristóbal Colón* (Barcelona: Jaime Seix, 1878).

⁵⁷Roselly de Lorgues, *Della vita di Cristoforo Colombo, e delle ragioni di chiederne la beatificazione* (Prato: Ranieri Guasti, 1878); and Isidoro Marchini, *Della controversia sul l'onestà di Cristoforo Colombo in Genova Lettera ad un amico* (Sambolino, 1877).

explains why the Franciscans officially took up the cause on June 12, 1877. The Minister General of the Order, Bernadino da Portogruaro, appointed Lorgues as postulator to gather the necessary documentation to request, by exceptional means, the opening of the cause in the Sacred Congregation of Rites.⁵⁸ Although the *Acta ordinis fratrum minorum* mentioned that Columbus was a Servant of God, his name did not get beyond the postulation phase and does not appear among the officially opened causes.⁵⁹

From the moment Lorgues placed canonization back on the agenda, the cause faced opponents. Once again, Sanguineti led the opposition with a speech dedicated to the canonization, in which he criticized the impact of Lorgues's theses and claimed that Lorgues had allowed himself to be carried away by sentiment rather than historical criticism. He accused Lorgues of translating a text incorrectly on purpose ("oh, traitorous translator!") so that it would appear Columbus had married Enriquez and that, therefore, their son had been the fruit of a union blessed by God. Similarly, he also fought against canonization because of the lack of veneration of Columbus for more than three centuries. Sanguineti's speech took place at the *Società Ligure di Storia Patria* in Genoa, which was more inclined toward a nonhagiographic reading. Nor did the *nihil obstat* of the diocese show that the new archbishop of Genoa, Salvatore Magnasco, was enthusiastic about the future canonization.⁶⁰

Despite the opposition of these Genoese churchmen, Baldi's efforts in the capital of Liguria led to a decisive boost for the campaign. In 1879, Baldi published *La glorificazione del genio Cristiano* (The Glorification of Christian Genius), a work that built on Lorgues's and began to gather support from prelates for the cause of canonization. In his work, he presented Columbus as "the First Evangelist of the Seas, the Revealer of the Globe, the Messenger of God, the Contemplator of the Word, the Amplifier of Creation, the Apostle of the New World, in short, he whom the Postulation of the bishops honors with the title of Apostolic Hero."⁶¹

La Civiltà Cattolica welcomed the publication of the work, pointing out the joy it felt seeing "how in Genoa, the homeland of Christopher, a fire of holy enthusiasm is being kindled, which will be fruitful for piety and the Catholic faith." Moreover, it defined Baldi as a "good citizen and fervent Christian."⁶² In 1881, an album containing 446 episcopal adhesions was presented to Leo XIII. These demonstrations of support did not cease, and by 1889, 843 prelates had already publicly declared their support for the cause. There was a marked European presence – particularly French and Italian, followed by Spanish prelates – yet representatives also came from across the globe. Notably, the group included eight prelates from the United States, eight from Canada, six from Mexico, two from Brazil, and one each from Colombia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina.⁶³

⁵⁸Postulazione, scatola 76–1, Archivio Storico Generale dell'Ordine dei Frati Minori, Rome (hereafter ASGOFM).

⁵⁹*Acta ordinis fratrum minorum [...] Fasciculus specialis pro septimo Ordinis Minorum conditi centenario commemorando XXVIII*, fasc. V (1909), 219–20; *Catalogus ac status causarum beatificationis Servorum Dei et Beatorum Canonizationes quae apud Sacram Rituum Congregationem per viam non cultus incedunt* (Typis polyglottis vaticanis, 1909).

⁶⁰Angelo Sanguineti, *La canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo* (Tipografia del R. Istituto Sordo-Muti, 1875).

⁶¹Giuseppe Baldi, *La glorificazione del genio cristiano. Sentimenti dell'episcopato e postulazione inedita di monsignor Rocco Cocchia a sua santità Leone XIII* (Tip. Delle Letture Cattoliche, 1879), 12.

⁶²Serie X, vol. XI, fasc. 697, June 27, 1879, 76.

⁶³Giuseppe Baldi, *Cristoforo Colombo glorificato dal voto dell'Episcopato cattolico. Terza raccolta di documenti* (Tip. Delle Letture Cattoliche, 1881).

V. 1892: A Catholic Celebration?

The Fourth Centenary of the discovery of the Americas was the first global commemoration, being celebrated simultaneously in countries on both sides of the Atlantic.⁶⁴ In addition to the various congresses, monuments, and tributes, historical exhibitions were held, such as that in Spain in 1892, and, above all, two great international exhibitions that symbolized progress and technical advances: the Italian-American Exposition in Genoa in 1892, and, especially, the Chicago World's Fair (also known as the World's Columbian Exposition) in 1893. Within this interpretation of progress, Catholic sectors sought to claim to be part of the narrative of what was then considered one of the greatest glories of European civilization. Proponents of the cause saw in this celebration a unique opportunity to achieve canonization for Columbus as a climax to the festivities. In 1879, Baldi pinned his hopes for the cause on this celebration, wishing "that, for the Fourth Centenary of his divine Messages to the New World, he will be elevated by the Vatican to venerable Protector of the Faithful."⁶⁵

Catholics' celebration of the discovery of the Americas was also organized concurrently in several countries. In 1888, the Spanish government requested, via its embassies in the Americas and the Holy See, any objects that may have been related to the "social situation of the Americas during the age of discovery."⁶⁶ The Secretary of State reported that the pope had welcomed the initiative to commemorate an "event that contributed so effectively to the spread of religion and civilization."⁶⁷ In Italy, too, Catholics organized commemorations. The archbishop of Genoa informed the Holy See that he had promoted the creation of a Catholic association, which would organize activities related to the centenary to counter a fear that "religion, which nevertheless played such an important role in this memorable enterprise, would be forgotten in these celebrations."⁶⁸ In Rome, the *La Romanina* society created a commission to celebrate "the great Italian," and "the great hero whose heart beat for our Rome, because he was Catholic, like Dante, Raphael, Michelangelo, Pellico, Manzoni, and it beat like theirs and their Catholic hearts beat for the Metropolis of Catholicism."⁶⁹

On the other side of the Atlantic, preparations were also underway for the celebration. In the United States, American Catholics invoked the figure of Columbus to legitimize their contribution to the national history. On the centenary of American independence, the Catholic writer John O'Kane Murray made this connection explicit, observing that "the story of Catholicity in the Western World is the golden chain that connects the landing of Columbus with 1876."⁷⁰ In this work, and in his broader celebration of the

⁶⁴On the Catholic celebration of the centenary, see Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, "Iglesia y políticas conmemorativas: La celebración católica del IV Centenario del Descubrimiento de América," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 50, no. 2 (2020): 17–40.

⁶⁵Giuseppe Baldi, *La glorificazione del genio cristiano. Sentimenti dell'episcopato e postulazione inédita di monsignor Rocco Cocchia a sua santità Leone XIII* (Tip. Delle Letture Cattoliche, 1879), 13–14.

⁶⁶Letter from the Spanish ambassador to secretary of State, April 4, 1888, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁶⁷Letter from secretary of State to the Spanish ambassador, April 9, 1888, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁶⁸Letter from archbishop of Genoa to pope Leo XIII, January 4, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁶⁹Letter from La Romanina to pope Leo XIII, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁷⁰John O'Kane Murray, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (D. & J. Sadlier, 1876), 2.

Catholic heroes who had shaped the nation's past, Murray positioned himself as a supporter of the campaign for Columbus's canonization.⁷¹

The American episcopate likewise adopted a favorable stance toward Columbus. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) identified his discovery as the foundational moment in the history of American Catholicism.⁷² This interpretation echoed across other Catholic sectors. Institutions such as the University of Notre Dame further promoted this vision of Columbus as a Catholic hero through a series of frescoes painted by Luigi Gregori in the Main Building in the 1880s.⁷³

Perhaps the most significant of these initiatives was the establishment of the Knights of Columbus in New Haven in 1882. Although established by Americans of Irish descent, its members embraced Columbus as a unifying symbol for all Americans, regardless of origin. In collaboration with Italian American organizations, the Knights of Columbus actively supported the campaign for Columbus's canonization and played a key role in these celebrations, converting Columbus into an example of devotion and virtue for his compatriots.⁷⁴ The predominantly Irish Knights of Columbus in New Haven was even able to muster 40,000 people to celebrate Columbus in the city in 1892.⁷⁵

The Fourth Centenary of the discovery of the Americas provided a very fertile context in which to reflect on the origins of national communities and their role in the world. In the United States, the 1892 centenary acts and the Chicago World's Fair helped to consolidate and extend the celebration of Columbus Day, a holiday that served as a vehicle to express the identities of the Italian and Irish immigrant communities.⁷⁶ In the Hispanic American sphere, although October 12 was not institutionalized as an annual celebration, the centenary served to consolidate the date in the cultural imagination, as well as to reflect on its national identity and its connection to the Hispanic American and/or Latin American community.⁷⁷

In an address to the Catholic Union of Chile in 1888, a young Chilean churchman and prominent Hispanic-American specialist, Ramón Ángel Jara, called for the creation of an American Catholic Federation that would bring together the efforts of all the Latin American dioceses and that would have the support of the pope.⁷⁸ Although it was a

⁷¹Murray, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 609; John O'Kane Murray, *Lives of the Catholic Heroes and Heroines of America* (New York: Kenedy, 1879), 174.

⁷²See John A. Russell's award-winning memoir, "The Catholic Church in the United States" and the Sermon "Indian Missions" by the Archbishop of Oregon, in *The Memorial Volume, a History of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, November 9–December 7, 1884* (The Baltimore Publishing Co., 1885), 9 and 114.

⁷³Christopher Kauffman, "Christopher Columbus and American Catholic Identity: 1880–1900," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 11, no. 2 (1993): 93–110.

⁷⁴See Thomas J. Schlereth "Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (1992): 937–68.

⁷⁵Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 108–40.

⁷⁶See footnote 10.

⁷⁷David Marcilhacy, *Raza hispana. Hispanoamericanismo e imaginario nacional en la España de la Restauración* (Centro de estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2010); Sandra Patricia Rodríguez "Conmemoraciones del cuarto y quinto centenario del '12 de octubre de 1492': debates sobre la identidad americana," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 38 (2011): 64–75; and Marcela García Sebastiani and David Marcilhacy, "Celebrating the Nation: 12 October, from 'Day of the Race' to Spanish National Day," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 3 (2017): 731–63.

⁷⁸On Jara, see Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, "La fiesta de las Banderas. Hispanoamericanismo católico en Santiago de Chile, Zaragoza y Buenos Aires (1887–1910)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 47, no. 2 (2017): 229–47.

global celebration, Jara especially invoked “the Latin race” in order to celebrate “a glory that belongs to it: that of the brave and holy man who discovered the American continent.”⁷⁹ It was a very ambitious initiative that originally considered organizing different activities to pay tribute to the “motherland” and Christopher Columbus at the transnational level. However, this transnational dimension was subsequently toned down, and the initiative was restricted to Chile.

In Ecuador, the conservative government supported the formation of a council that celebrated the discovery of the Americas as “a work of faith, the glory of the Church, and also of Italy. This great and transcendental event is why, today, Spanish America alone has forty million Catholics in its midst.”⁸⁰ The vice president of the country, Pablo Herrera, asked the council to inform the pope that, “he would deign to arrange that the centenary of the discovery of the New World be celebrated with religious festivals throughout the Catholic world.”⁸¹ In another missive, Herrera pointed out that the centenary would be an “opportunity to publicly and solemnly manifest that the temporal sovereignty of the Holy Father must be restored,” and he believed the celebration of the Fourth Centenary should have a global nature.⁸² Meanwhile, the archbishop of Montevideo, Mariano Soler, also asked the pope for the ceremony to have a supranational dimension and that, in this case, an encyclical be addressed to the bishops of the Americas “on the religious interests of the New World and the dangers that lie ahead for its future if it does not embrace the Holy Church and its civilizing influence.”⁸³

The Holy See ultimately channeled all these initiatives through the encyclical *Quarto abeunte saeculo* in July 1892. The idea of addressing the world may have been partly motivated by a 1891 request by the Spanish Ambassador to the Secretary of State to recommend “that the prelates of Europe and the Americas contribute as much as possible to the commemoration to be held in Spain in 1892.”⁸⁴ Indeed, following a meeting of the Section for Relations with States on April 14, 1891, the Secretary of State sent a letter to all the nuncios and apostolic delegates to ask them to collaborate with the Spanish government in the festivities and, especially, in the exhibition of pre-Columbian objects.⁸⁵

The *Quarto abeunte saeculo* addressed the episcopate of the Americas, Spain, and Italy to ask them to celebrate October 12 with a *Te Deum*, claiming Columbus as a Catholic hero in contrast to those who considered him an emblem of progress. Leo XIII declared “Columbus is ours” in this encyclical. Still, the formula Leo XIII came up with cooled attempts to canonize him. In other words, the pope recognized the religious dimension of the discovery of the Americas and linked the memory of Columbus to the Catholic

⁷⁹Ramón Ángel Jara, *Unión Católica de Chile. Celebración del IV Centenario del descubrimiento de América por Colón* (Imprenta Cervantes, 1890), 6.

⁸⁰Letter from Pablo Herrera to Mario Mosenni, April 18, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁸¹Letter from Pablo Herrera to Mario Mosenni, April 18, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁸²Letter from Pablo Herrera to secretary of State, November 8, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁸³Letter from Mariano Soler to Leo XIII, December 31, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896 Rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁸⁴Letter from Spanish ambassador to secretary of State, Mars12, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

⁸⁵Fondo Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Rapporti delle Sesioni, 687, 12 April 1891. Spagna, Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato; and letter from secretary of State to nuncios and Apostolic Delegates, April, 14, 1891, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, anno 1896, rubrica 262, fasc. 1, AAV.

Church, yet he did so not through holiness, but through heroism and virtue. Thus, in order to avoid making any pronouncement on canonization or, more precisely, with the aim of deactivating the initiative, he appealed to a heroic secular model of interpreting Columbus – an approach that was very popular in the nineteenth century – that he endowed with a providential religious meaning.⁸⁶

The Catholic Church managed to take on a significant role in centenary ceremonies and linked the discovery of the Americas and the figure of Columbus to Catholicism. Yet the topic of canonization occupied a very secondary place within the pronouncements of the time. Some, like the journalist Carbonero y Sol in Spain, Abbé Casabianca in France, and Captain Isidoro G. Baroni in Italy, continued to defend the canonization of Columbus and even perceived it as something close to achieving.⁸⁷

In fact, this was the reason the Knights of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher in Spain requested that the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem directly ask Leo XIII to initiate the beatification process. The Knights justified their request by alluding to the clear religious inspiration behind the discovery and, paraphrasing Lorgues, pointed out how, at the moment when the Protestant Reformation was taking hold and gaining ground against Catholicism, Columbus “extended his dominion across the seas [...], winning over as many American tribes as Europeans embraced the principles of Protestantism.”⁸⁸

In contrast to his enthusiasm, Leo XIII’s words offered a key to interpreting the event in which Columbus was defended from secular presuppositions, but without advocating his canonization. Thus, for example, the bishop of Montevideo and one of the main ultramontane activists in Latin America, Mariano Soler, commented in his pastoral letter dedicated to the centenary how Leo XIII, “on exalting the great discoverer, does so by placing him in his true place, above the great heroes of history, although below the Saints, who will always remain the first among the sons of Adam; thus rejecting with fine delicacy the exaggerations of immoderate enthusiasts.”⁸⁹

This was an interpretation resembling that of an October 12, 1892, speech by the priest Esteban Muñoz Donoso in Chile. He described Columbus as “the only man who, without being a saint, is glorified today by the Catholic Church in its temples. The imperishable feat of this hero is almost elevated to the level of the august mysteries, not because of what is human about it, but because of the religious faith that animated it and the consequences it brought for millions and millions of immortal souls.”⁹⁰ The archbishop of Santiago de

⁸⁶Lucy Riall, “Martyr Cults in Nineteenth-Century Italy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 2 (2010): 255–87, 275.

⁸⁷León Carbonero y Sol, *Homenaje á Cristobal Colón, de la Orden Tercera de N.P. San Francisco en el cuarto centenario del descubrimiento del Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid, 1892); Abbé Casabianca, *Glorification religieuse de Christophe Colomb* (Paris: Ch. Poussielge, 1892); Isidoro G. Baroni, *Colombo ed il Quarto centenario della scoperta d'America* (Venezia: Editrice di M. S. fra compositori tipografi, 1892).

⁸⁸Letter from the knights of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Spain to Leo XIII, December 8, 1890, Fondo Q (II), 106, 26, ACCS. See also the letter from the knights of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre to Luigi Piavi, 30 December 1890, Luigi Piavi, 1.6–1.3. Patriarche. Correspondence 1890–1905, Historical Archives of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem. I would like to thank Sebastián Hernández Méndez for sharing this archival reference.

⁸⁹Mariano Soler, *Pastoral eucarístico-apologética del Ilmo. Sr. obispo diocesano con ocasión del cuarto centenario del descubrimiento de América* (Montevideo, 1892), 51. Para la figura de Mariano Soler y el centenario ver Sebastián Hernández Méndez, *El activista del Papa. Mariano Soler y el internacionalismo católico en América Latina (1846–1908)* (Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2025).

⁹⁰*El cuarto centenario del Descubrimiento de América. Arzobispado de Santiago de Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de Emilio Pérez, 1892), 34–5.

Chile, Mariano Casanova, spoke in very similar terms. An old proponent of the canonization cause, he used a pastoral to underscore the Catholic inspiration behind the discovery and Columbus's life without discussing saintliness.⁹¹ Casanova had no problem combining Lorgues with Protestant authors to underline the religious dimension of the event.⁹²

After the celebration of the discovery, Lorgues made one final attempt at canonization by trying to get Queen Isabella II of Spain (then exiled in Paris) to support his cause. In December 1892, he sent his letter to Leo XIII, who in turn sent it to the Congregation of Rites through the Cardinal Secretary of State, Mariano Rampolla. Lorgues tried to turn the pope's words around, and he announced that he was collecting postulations from bishops appointed during the last three years to add them to the 900 adhesions already obtained. For her part, the queen again connected the matter, as she had done throughout her reign, to the memory of Isabella I to request the canonization of Columbus, "begging you to finish the work that the great Isabella the Catholic began."⁹³

VI. The Failure of the Columbus Cause?

Obviously, at first sight, the canonization project failed since it did not achieve its main goal: the elevation of Columbus to the altars. Nevertheless, if we understand canonization in its apologetic and geopolitical sense, the campaign was very important in articulating and defending Catholicism's contribution to the development of civilization and in linking the history of the American continent to Catholicism. Additionally, the project managed to mobilize a record number of 910 postulations from prelates, superiors of religious orders, and other personalities all over the world.

In the final years of his life, Logues, the driving force behind this extensive campaign, had become somewhat disillusioned and financially ruined. Léon Bloy claimed that the count had confessed to him that he had lost a large part of his money in this campaign, especially his effort in 1892, which "should have been decisive for his cause," and that Columbus's canonization "would be assured if the Congregation of Rites could be paid precisely the same amount that he complains of having lost."⁹⁴

A year before his death, on September 9, 1897, Lorgues wrote a bitter letter to the postulator general of the Franciscans, Francesco M. Paolini, in which he pointed out the difficulties that he had to face in his enterprise. Indeed, Baldi's recent death put the continuity of the project at risk. The library and its Colombian museum had been transferred to the city of Genoa, making up the archives of the Berio Library. However, Baldi's widow intended to hand over the 910 postulations in favor of the cause of Columbus that Baldi had been keeping to the archbishop of Genoa, Tommaso Reggio, who was "opposed to the cause of Columbus, like his predecessor monsignor Magnasco and all his suffragans of Liguria."⁹⁵ Lorgues managed to convince her otherwise, and the

⁹¹On the occasion of the canonization of the Mexican, Felipe de Jesús, in 1863, the then young priest also called for the canonization of Columbus. Mariano Casanova, *Obras oratorias* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de Cervantes, 1891), 306–25, 320.

⁹²*El cuarto centenario del Descubrimiento de América. Arzobispado de Santiago de Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de Emilio Pérez, 1892), 7–10.

⁹³Letter from Queen Elizabeth II of Spain to Leo XIII, December 8, 1892, Fondo Q (II), 106, V Cartella, ACCS.

⁹⁴Léon Bloy, *Journal inédit, vol. I 1892–1895* (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 1996), 1029.

⁹⁵Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to Francesco M. Paolini, September 9, 1897, Postulazione, scatola 76-1, ASGOFM.

postulations were sent to Rome, where they were expected to be sent to the Congregation of Rites only when it was necessary to initiate the process. Lorgues accused the secretary of the Congregation of Rites, Domenico Bartolini, of having removed the postulations, by exceptional means, of several prelates whose names

had disappeared from the file. Only one postulation remained. They would not have dared to destroy it, because it was from a cardinal: the Eminence Donnet, archbishop of Bordeaux. When Monsignor Bartolini was replaced, I saw this proof with my own eyes in the office of the Congregation of Rites, where I had a friend at the time.⁹⁶

Bartolini “did not want the cause” because “it was presented by exceptional means,” because the Congregation of Rites “knew of no exception,” and because there was no example of any “canonized sailor.”⁹⁷ What is more, “the secret reason for their opposition is that, by exceptional means, the deadlines and costs would be considerably reduced.”⁹⁸ In order to reinforce his position, Bartolini contacted Sanguinetti. To challenge Sanguinetti and other authors, Lorgues was preparing a monograph titled *Les Calomnieux modernes du serviteur de Dieu, Christophe Colomb* (Modern Slanderers of God’s Servant, Christopher Columbus, 1898). In truth, Lorgues’s suspicions could have been justified since, in the folder kept in the Cause of the Saints, half of the dossier is made up of photocopies and printouts that were added later. Whatever the case, the process never appeared in the catalogue of the causes initiated in the Congregation of Rites.⁹⁹

Besides the difficulties outlined above, the death of the campaign’s most active proponents, Baldi in 1897 and Lorgues in 1898, was a severe blow to the cause of canonization. Lorgues wrote to Leo XIII to try to get Viscount Henri Macé appointed officially as the postulator of the cause.¹⁰⁰ However, the appointment of the postulator expired with Lorgues and could not be inherited.¹⁰¹ After Lorgues’s death, the cause remained exclusively in the hands of the Franciscans. Indeed, the process appeared in the *Acta ordinis fratrum minorum* until 1950, although it did specify the need to undertake it in an ordinary manner and to carry out a critical historical analysis. The doubts surrounding Columbus’s union with Beatriz Enriquez persisted and made it difficult to definitively initiate the process.¹⁰²

Those impressive requests signed by hundreds of bishops seemed to be a thing of the past; now they were more like isolated petitions, which barely left a record in the archives.

⁹⁶Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to Francesco M. Paolini, September 9, 1897, Postulazione, scatola 76-1, ASGOFM.

⁹⁷Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to Francesco M. Paolini, September 9, 1897, Postulazione, scatola 76-1, ASGOFM.

⁹⁸Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to Francesco M. Paolini, September 9, 1897, Postulazione, scatola 76-1, ASGOFM.

⁹⁹*Catalogus ac status causarum beatificationis Servorum Dei et Beatorum Canonizationes quae apud Sacram Rituum Congregationem per viam non cultus incedunt* (Rome, 1909).

¹⁰⁰Letter from Roselly de Lorgues to Leo XIII, Mai 14, 1897, Postulazione, scatola 76-1, ASGOFM.

¹⁰¹Henry Vignaud, “L’ancienne et la nouvelle campagne pour la canonization de Christophe Colomb,” *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 6 (1909): 40.

¹⁰²Alfonso Marini Dettina, “Suppliche per la canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo,” in *Atti del II Congresso Colombiano* (CESCOM, 2006), 659–72.

Thus, for example, the Genoese priest Antonio Marcone wrote to Leo XIII in 1900 with a petition from Genoese Catholics in 1867. Some years earlier, in 1894, he had already sent another of his works aimed at defending the legitimacy of Columbus's marriage and second child.¹⁰³ In 1909, there were rumors that the Knights of Columbus, with the support of the archbishop of Philadelphia, wanted to promote the cause, although it would appear that this did not materialize in any formal proposal.¹⁰⁴

In the 1920s, Professor Isidoro Marchini, one of the last living figures from the canonization campaign of the second half of the nineteenth century, sent a formal request to Pius XI to reopen the cause. He summarized all the support that the cause had gained, as well as statements in favor of the initiative by popes like Pius IX and Leo XIII.¹⁰⁵ In 1941, the question returned briefly to the media with a petition drawn up by some American prelates.¹⁰⁶ The most recent document dates from 1957 and is in the file of the Cause of the Saints. It is a petition for the joint canonization of the nationalist poet, Alessandro Manzoni, the crusader, Goffre di Buglione, and Christopher Columbus.¹⁰⁷

VII. Conclusion

We tend to analyze historical processes through the lens of success or failure, from knowledge of the outcome, which sometimes prevents us from seeing what was possible and yet ultimately could not be carried out. Columbus's canonization cause has been generally viewed as somewhat of an eccentricity or a demonstration of religious fanaticism or bigotry. However, in examining the cause more closely, we see how this project responded to a discursive logic that was attempting to explain the role of the Catholic Church in the birth of the modern world. The effort to canonize Columbus served to underscore the civilizing role of Catholicism, to praise its contribution to the development of human progress, and to strengthen the connection between the Discovery of America and the Catholic Church. The cause was transnational in nature and seduced prelates, priests, monks, journalists, and novelists on both sides of the Atlantic. It reached its peak between the 1860s and 1880s, and was even considered for discussion at the First Vatican Council, as well as receiving support from the Franciscans.

Columbus was presented as a global saint. While it is true that saints within the Catholic Church have a global vocation, they also have a strong local, regional, and/or

¹⁰³Letter from Antonio Marcone to Leo XIII, November 17, 1894; and letter from Antonio Marcone to Leo XIII, Mai 9, 1900, Segretaria di Stato, rubriche 1878–1913, Anno 1900 rubrica 18. Fasc. 1, AAV. He published a work to prove the legitimacy of Columbus' second son, Antonio Marcone, *L'Autorità di Mons. Bartolomeo las casas nella nascita di Don Fernando Colombo secondo figlio dell'eroe scopritore delle indie* (S. Bernardino, 1894).

¹⁰⁴Henry Vignaud, "L'ancienne et la nouvelle campagne pour la canonization de Christophe Colomb," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 6 (1909). The proposal found support in some media. In Spain, see *La Hormiga de oro*, November 20, 1909; and *El Correo español*, November 23, 1909.

¹⁰⁵Isidoro Marchini to Pius XI, 1 November 1928, Fondo Q (II), 106, VI Cartella Frontespizio XX. Contenut Documenti 1928–1958, ACCS.

¹⁰⁶Alfonso Marini Dettina, "Suppliche per la canonizzazione di Cristoforo Colombo," in *Atti del II Congresso Colombiano* (CESCOM, 2006), 659–72.

¹⁰⁷Letter from Secretary of State to Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, October 8, 1957, Fondo Q (II), 106, VI Cartella Frontespizio XX. Contenut Documenti 1928–1958, ACCS.

national anchorage. In contrast to these models, Columbus was presented as an oceanic saint, a saint who was not linked to any particular country and who facilitated the connection between Europe and the Americas, thereby reinforcing the global dimension of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, this very attribute proved to be a significant impediment in the process of his canonization, as uncertainties surrounding his place of birth and burial prevented a local bishop from assuming responsibility for the proceedings.

In the end, the activities associated with the fourth anniversary of the discovery of the Americas demonstrated the collapse of a process that was never initiated. Columbus would not be a saint, but he could be a Catholic hero. Resistance from one section of the curia and the impossibility of demonstrating the legitimacy of Columbus's union with Enríquez were constant hindrances to the project. However, the question of slavery and Columbus's treatment of indigenous peoples was of less importance in the course of the canonization cause. Some authors, like the Krausist Luis Vidart, condemned the hidden past of the Genoese mariner. During a speech at the Spanish Royal Academy of History, he stated that, on account of the above, "the canonization of Columbus remains unresolved and sleeps the sleep of the righteous and will sleep it eternally, Rome not being able to allow a figure to be placed on an altar who is obscured by such mists as a man."¹⁰⁸ Thus, the interpretive frameworks that would later underpin Columbus's twentieth-century delegitimization were entirely absent from the debate. In the 1890s, commemorative discourse privileged an uncritical glorification of Columbus, ignoring episodes of violence, coercion, and indigenous suffering.¹⁰⁹

Almost a century later, during the discourse surrounding the Fifth Centenary, the then-pope, John Paul II, scarcely mentioned Columbus. The commemoration unfolded against a backdrop of mounting criticism from indigenous movements. In an effort to avoid controversy, the pontiff distanced the Catholic Church from the rhetoric of "discovery," emphasizing the evangelizing dimension of the encounter instead. In contrast to the speeches made a century earlier, some darker elements in the narrative were beginning to emerge, and the papacy preferred to distance itself from the idea of discovery and the subsequent imperial domination.

The Black Lives Matter movement further intensified these reassessments by targeting monuments perceived as symbols of racial injustice, and activists removed, toppled, or vandalized dozens of statues of Columbus. The figure of the Genoese navigator became increasingly contentious, leading authorities in various cities to relocate or dismantle such memorials. Monuments once regarded as objects of civic pride – such as the murals depicting the life of Columbus painted by Luigi Gregori at the University of Notre Dame – were temporarily concealed with removable tapestries. Columbus had thus shifted from saint to hero to an uncomfortable presence in public memory. In retrospect, some Vatican authorities might well have considered it fortunate that canonization was never pursued.

Acknowledgments. This research was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities through the project MICIN/AEI "Powers in the Shadows: Public Opinion, Plots, and Conspiracy Theories in the Contemporary World (1789–1914)" (PID2023-146937NB-I00). The author would like to thank Cameron Watson for the translation of the text. The author would also like to thank the anonymous

¹⁰⁸ *La Ilustración hispano-americana*, December 31, 1891.

¹⁰⁹ Restall, *The Nine Lives of Christopher Columbus*, 55–9.

reviewers and participants at the Santos Julia seminar, the La España Global research project workshop, and Alexandra Delattre's seminar at the EHESS (Paris) for their helpful feedback.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

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Cite this article: Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, "A Global Saint for the Modern World? The Transnational Campaign for the Canonization of Christopher Columbus," *Church History* (2026): 1–21. doi:[10.1017/S000964072610328X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S000964072610328X).