

# The EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVE

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## The Mystery of Carlism

On dynastic legitimacy, Hispanic continuity, and doctrinal traditionalism  
MIGUEL AYUSO

## Battle of Lepanto: 450 Years

HABSBURG-LOTHRINGEN  
DE MATTEI  
COULOMBE & CHESTERTON

## Terror in the Western Mind

How cowardice, doubt, and relativism mark the West's response to terrorism  
DAVID MARTIN JONES & M.L.R. SMITH

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Cover image by Michael Pleesz.



# The Mystery of Carlism



It is no easy task to present a concise account of a phenomenon as complex and prolonged as Carlism. Any explanation, however, must begin with its three fundamental principles or 'pillars': dynastic legitimacy, the continuity of the Hispanic world prior to the modern revolutions, and the doctrinal corpus of traditionalism.

## Dynastic legitimacy

Carlism has a long and venerable history. It began as a legitimist response to the usurpation of the Spanish throne following the death of King Ferdinand VII in 1833. The kingdom's semi-Salic law required the Crown to be passed to the King's brother, the *Infante* Don Carlos, hailed then as Charles V by his supporters, the *Carlistas*. Instead, an out-and-out coup—veiled by an unlawful attempt to modify the law of succession—brought to the throne the *Infanta* Doña Isabel, the infant daughter of Ferdinand VII and María Cristina of Naples.

War immediately broke out in Spain. This conflict, which lasted for seven years, was especially violent in Castile, the Basque Provinces, Navarre, Catalonia, and Valencia. It ended with the defeat of the Carlists and the so-called 'Embrace of Vergara.' War later returned in the 1840s (during the so-called Second Carlist War), though on a smaller scale, under Charles V's son, Charles VI. A third war erupted under Charles VII—Charles V's grandson—between 1872 and 1876, during which he effectively ruled several regions of Spain.

Even the 'civil war' of 1936-1939 saw an important armed Carlist component in some of these same regions (one thinks of legendary Navarre). Further, the Traditionalist Communion—a movement that brought together supporters of the legitimate dynasty—was one of the decisive forces behind the *Alzamiento* of 1936 against the Second Republic and its subsequent victory (although it would later progressively distance itself from Franco's regime).

## Continuity of the Hispanic world

Had Carlism been centred *only* on a dynastic dispute, it would hardly have survived more than a few decades. Over time, however, the question of legitimacy—which continues to be personified in the person of Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma—served as a rallying call over other issues, with which it merged in an inextricable unity.

Foremost among these is the venerable continuity of the common tradition of the Hispanic peoples, spread over five continents. Though not entirely conscious of it at first, Carlism progressively became the continuation of that ancient, traditional way of life. It would eventually suffer successive attacks from absolutism, liberalism, and socialism. Just as medieval Christendom had been preserved during the age of the House of Austria, so too, in the task of making the Hispanic world into a sort of *Christianitas minor* in the face of modern Europe, Carlism sought to be the preserve of a *Christianitas minima* in a world of revolutions.

## Doctrinal traditionalism

Dynastic struggle was thus the occasion for a confrontation between the defenders of the natural and Christian order (notwithstanding all its accretions and deformations, largely introduced during the 18th century), on the one hand, and those minions of revolution in their varied manifestations. Rather than forming an ideology—which is a partial and erroneous view of the world—Carlism held to a body of doctrines based on the principles of sound philosophy and right reason—and therefore based also on Christian wisdom.

This 'traditionalism'—which in Spain's case has always been the purest, lacking the 'mystifications' and errors that it has suffered elsewhere—has made Spanish Carlism the most counter-revolutionary movement in the world, particularly in the sense articulated by Joseph de Maistre: not a revolution in reverse but the reverse of the revolution. That is, it is about the establishment of society on the natural and divine order—and with it, the reconstruction of the social fabric.

## The unity of Carlist principles

It is easy to see why these various elements cannot be separated from one another. There is an inherent *unity* at work. Perhaps not enough emphasis has been given to this singular trait, which distinguishes Hispanic traditionalism—that is, Carlism—from nationalism, syndicalism, authoritarianism, and other '-isms' of various kinds. Ideological thought—which inevitably affirms the modern State, an entity distinct from the natural political community—absolutizes

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OPPOSITE:  
A depiction of the First Carlist War by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported.

# EL REQUETE AL SERVICIO DE ESPAÑA



*¡Alistate!*

**A**GRUPACIÓN DE **J**UVENTUDES **T**RADICIONALISTAS  
**C**OMUNIÓN **T**RADICIONALISTA **C**ARLISTA



*partial* perspectives, placing them at the service of total and centralising action. For this reason, some have confused Carlism, which is essentially monarchical, with 'monarchical absolutism.'

Later, with the passage of time, the same error has led others to believe that Carlism—with its championing of local rights—has fanned the embers of the particularist nationalisms of Spain's various regions. Closer to our own time, only an ideological framework can explain attempts to assimilate Carlism into the hodgepodge of fascist-leaning single parties invented by Franco or to transform it into a sort of autarchic progressive socialism within a broader coalition of mostly Marxist forces (as Charles-Hugh of Bourbon sought to do in the 1970s). In all these cases (and others that could be mentioned) what stands out is the *ideological* mindset: that ever-present ingredient of modernity.

Carlism—affirming a continuity with the pre-statist order of Christendom among the Hispanic peoples and exemplified in a legitimate dynasty—remains distinct and isolated from all modern ideologies. Carlism brings together and can harmonize various aspects that, at first glance, appear to be, if not contradictory, in an unstable balance. This is why, in the political history of Spain, it has been easy for Carlists to find partial and temporal affinities with a number of political forces—from the republicans to the federalists or the Alphonsine 'traditionalist' monarchists. But it is also why they have hardly ever entered into 'national fronts' that pretend to be all-inclusive.

More concretely, Carlism is frequently still called to adhere to coalitions and alliances with so-called 'national' Spanish political forces seeking to oppose the advance of the revolution. Yet such forces have themselves either been born as revolutionary movements—as in the case of Falangism—or have not been more than a partially healthy conservative reaction against modern errors—such as Francoism—remaining quite distinct from traditionalism.

## Carlism, today and tomorrow

Unlike in the past, Carlism today does not have much political relevance. Nevertheless, its intellectual influence has a wide reach, even outside of Spain's borders. This is particularly the case in the Hispanic world. It is influential in Portugal, for example, with Miguelist legitimism, which was very close to Carlism in its origins

(though it lost its vigour much earlier). In Naples, too, it is present through the recently invigorated vindications of the Bourbon kingdom of Hispanic heritage. In Hispanic America, it is still found among various traditionalist groups—particularly those who deem the processes of independence of the early 19th century as utter disasters and who seek the reintegration of the entire Hispanic *orbis*.

It should be noted that in France, Britain, and the United States, there are numerous scholars and writers associated with Carlism. They tend to appreciate the 'purity' and unity of its doctrine, as well as the coherence of its historical record. In all these cases—notwithstanding some differences in emphasis—there is a common factor: all its sympathisers claim that Carlism is the one, great distinguishing mark in the history of peninsular Spain, especially when compared to the history of the nations of the rest of the Hispanic world, and even that of the Latin, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, or Slavic worlds.

The motto of Carlism is *Dios, Patria, Fueros y Rey Legítimo*: God, Fatherland, Local Rights, and Legitimate King. While some might consider this somewhat antiquated or even obsolete, it remains a banner of hope for a world in decay. Only the instauration of all things in Christ can bring peace in the face of the nihilistic—and already tottering—globalized new world order. Such an instauration would occur by means of civil powers that are subject to the ethical order that the Church bestows, capable of safeguarding both the liberty of peoples and the common tradition of their fatherlands.

Given the current situation of peninsular Spain—as well as that of the Hispanic American continent and beyond—Hispanic traditionalism today possesses extraordinary potential and it is, it must be said, worth considering seriously. ■