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ALTAR AND HEARTH:
THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY
1521-1565

by MICHAEL V. GANNON

The Catholic Church in this Country does not begin her history after colonies were formed, and men had looked to their temporal well-being. Her priests were among the explorers of the coast, were the pioneers of the vast interior; with Catholic settlers came the minister of God, and Mass was said to hallow the land and draw down the blessing of heaven before the first step was taken to rear a human habitation. The altar was older than the hearth.

JOHN GILMARY SHEA'S celebrated lines written in 1886 as part of his introduction to a now obsolete history of American Catholicity, ring true as ever in this day of perhaps more sophisticated and discerning journeys into Florida's beginnings.¹ Wherever the historian's eye is cast, there still is the altar, the ancient Christian table of sacrifice, around which gathered, at one date or another, all the great names that make up our early history, when *La Florida* was an outpost of empire and a curve on the Rim of Christendom. Priests and friars, conquistadors and hidalgos, soldiers and statesmen, Indians from the swamps and shoreland, Spaniards and Minorcans, rich and poor, the innocent and the repentant - they are a long line of stout men, and if there was some evil in them, there was also much of good; and if at times they stooped to small and mean things, they also rose to heights of courage and generosity and sacrifice which are the real patents of nobility, and the expected fruits of Christian life.

1. John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York, 1886), I, 10.

To its unfailing credit, Florida's story begins with a positive contribution: the founding of missions for the Indians. If in later English colonies to the north, the only good Indian was a dead Indian, as Herbert E. Bolton concluded, in the Spanish colonies it was thought worthwhile to improve the natives for this life as well as for the next.² Long before the House of Burgesses was meeting at Jamestown and well before the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock, the Indians of Florida were being taught the elements of Christianity and the arts of reading, writing, and singing. A century and a half before Fray Junipero Serra's friars could count 26,000 settled Christian Indians along the *camino real* of California, an equal number lived within sound of mission bells between St. Augustine and Tallahassee. Their villages bore such names as Name of God, Holy Faith, St. Catherine, St. Joseph, Holy Cross, Ascension, St. Michael, and Our Lady of the Rosary. And this golden age lasted until 1702-1704, when the Spanish Indian system, based upon religion and agriculture, came at last into fatal collision with the English system which was based on trade and aggrandizement. It is the antecedents of this golden age that we relate here.

Ponce de Leon's 1513 voyage of discovery was not a chapter in Catholic history; it was more like a preface. He came here for less noble reasons. Dispossessed of a governor's office in Puerto Rico, Ponce set out to find wealth and power in islands that he thought lay to the northwest. According to the best estimates, Ponce made his landfall on the upper east coast of the present state of Florida; the date was sometime between the second and the eighth of April.

Of the ceremonies of landing there is no record. In any event, there could not have been any offering of Mass, since no priest was with the party. Woodbury Lowery conjectured that on landing, Ponce may have recited the simple prayer said to have been used by Columbus: "Almighty and Eternal Lord God, Who by Thy Sacred Word hast created heaven, earth, and sea, blessed and glorified be Thy Name and praised be Thy Majesty, and grant that through Thy humble servant Thy Sacred Name may

2. Herbert E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies," *American Historical Review*, XXXIII (October 1917), 42-61. See also Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732* (Durham, 1929), 7, 23-27.

be known and preached in this other part of the world. Amen.”³

Taking a southerly course down the coast, Ponce rounded the Florida Keys, which he named The Martyrs, “because the high rocks looked at a distance like men who are suffering.” He sailed up the west coast of the peninsula to what may have been the present site of Pensacola. On May 23, he again turned southward, and anchored at or near Charlotte Bay⁴ which for many years bore his name - Bahia Juan Ponce. Here he had a bloody encounter with Indians and decided to return to Puerto Rico. Ponce’s voyage had not been a missionary adventure. Although a Catholic, there were no specifically religious purposes associated with his enterprise. The first missionary chapter came later, and it was Ponce who wrote it.

On September 27, 1514, Ponce was commissioned by Charles V to secure possession of his new discovery and to settle “the island of Florida.” He was to take with him a number of priests. “Treat them [the Indians] as best you can,” the king admonished, “and . . . seek in every possible way that they be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith.”⁵

Seven years passed before Ponce could get his expedition underway. In the meantime, two events occurred that are worth notice. First, an accident took place at sea which may have brought the first priest to Florida’s shores. His name was Father Alonzo Gonzales, and he accompanied an ill-fated voyage of Francisco Hernandez de Cordova from Cuba to the Bahamas in 1517. Stray winds blew Cordova from his course to Yucatan where fifty-six of his party of 110 were killed by Indians. It is not recorded if Father Gonzales was among those killed. If he was not, presumably he was with Cordova when storms blew Cordova’s fleet

3. Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements Within the Present Limits of the United States: 1513-1561* (New York, 1901), 139 and note. Lowery is still the best secondary source for Ponce’s voyage.

4. See map in Buckingham Smith (trans.), *The Narrative of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca* (Washington, 1851), 153. This chart, in the Royal Archives of the Indies, is attached to theedula granted in 1521 to Fransesco de Garay. Note though, that other authorities believe Ponce sailed north only to the present-day area of Charlotte Harbor. See, for example, T. Frederick Davis, “Juan Ponce de Leon’s Voyages to Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XIV (July 1935), 43.

5. Quoted in *ibid.*, 147.

against the west coast of Florida during the return to Cuba.⁶ In 1519, another explorer, Alonzo Alvarez de Pineda, discovered that Florida was not an island, but a peninsula. Pineda himself fixed the western juncture to the mainland at Mobile River and Bay, which he named after the Holy Spirit - Rio de Espiritu Santo.⁷

In 1521, Ponce de Leon at last embarked from Puerto Rico in two ships which carried 200 men, fifty horses, a variety of domestic animals and agricultural implements, gunpowder, cross-bows, and other arms. Secular and regular priests accompanied the expedition to establish mission posts among the Indians. Their landing in Florida is the first positively authenticated instance of the presence of Catholic priests on the mainland of the United States.⁸

Where precisely Ponce came ashore on the Florida coast is not known; probably it was in the vicinity of Charlotte Harbor on the lower Gulf coast. There he was immediately and furiously attacked by Indians. Many of his followers were killed, and Ponce himself was badly wounded by an arrow. He quickly re-embarked for Cuba where he died a few days later of his wound. Noble in conception, this first missionary enterprise had been a conspicuous failure before it could even take root.⁹

Five years later, misfortune again struck another colonizing attempt farther north. Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon, royal judge in Santo Domingo, sailed toward Florida with 600 men and women, including two priests and one lay brother of the Order of St.

6. Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del mar oceano*, 6 vols. (Madrid, 1727), I, 47, 49.

7. Lowery, *Spanish Settlements*, 151.

8. Secular, or diocesan, priests work in geographically defined parishes under the direct supervision of a bishop. Their mode of life dates from the beginning of Christianity. The term "secular," which was the more common designation in the sixteenth century, refers to the fact that the secular priests work "in the world" - *in saecula*. They are called "diocesan" because their parishes make up a larger geographic unity called a diocese, over which the bishop presides. Regular, or religious, priests are members of religious orders, e. g., Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans, committed to special tasks, such as charity, education, or the missions. Regular priests take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The older orders, including those that worked in Florida in the early centuries, are exempt in great part from the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

9. Lowery, *Spanish Settlements*, 158-59.

Dominic. Following the eastern seaboard of *La Florida* as far north as the Chesapeake Bay, Ayllon's party disembarked on September 29, 1526, and began erecting houses and a modest chapel dedicated to St. Michael. Food supplies soon ran low, however, and widespread sickness followed the coming of winter cold. After Ayllon died in the arms of one of the Dominican priests, the 150 famished and half-frozen survivors returned to Santo Domingo. Thus, another colonizing attempt failed.¹⁰

Panfilo de Narvaez was a tall, commanding man, fair-complexioned, red-bearded, and one-eyed (he had lost an eye trying to discipline Cortes in Mexico). By all accounts he was a brave and resourceful soldier, and when, in 1526, he returned to Spain after twenty-six years of royal service in the New World, Charles V awarded him settlement rights to all Florida.

On June 17, 1527, Narvaez sailed from the Spanish port of San Lucar with 600 colonists and soldiers. He set a course for the same Florida Gulf coast where Ponce de Leon had been repulsed and mortally wounded. Narvaez brought with him a company of priests to minister to the colonists and to evangelize the Indians - an unknown number of secular priests and five Franciscan friars. Of the secular priests only El Asturiano, "the Asturian," is known to us by name. Superior of the Franciscan party was Father Juan Xuarez, named bishop-elect of Florida, although he was never consecrated. For all his talents, Narvaez' expedition was doomed to failure; within seven years' time only four men of those who landed at Florida were still alive.

One of the survivors was Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, treasurer and high sheriff, who wrote a long account of the expedition.¹¹ From him we learn that enough misfortunes to discourage any but the most hardy of missionaries befell the voyagers at sea before they finally reached the shores of Florida. At last, with many thanksgivings, Narvaez anchored in the vicinity of St. Clement's Point on the peninsula west of Tampa Bay on Holy Thursday, April 14, 1528.

10. Victor Francis O'Daniel, O.P., *Dominicans in Early Florida* (New York, 1930), 6-8.

11. *La Relacion que dio Aluar nunez cabeza de vaca de lo acaescido en las Indias en la armada donde yua por gouernador Pamphilo de narbaez desde el ano de veynte y siete hasta el ano de treynta y seys que boluio a Seuilla con tres de su compania* (Zamora, 1542).

Narvaez and his followers were anxious to meet the Indians of the area before taking formal possession of the land. On landing the next day, therefore, they immediately set out toward an Indian village spotted from aboard ship. When they arrived, the village was empty; the Indians had fled and were hiding in the brush. A gold ornament was found, however, which led the Spanish to think that more of the precious metal would be discovered farther inland.

Narvaez solemnly took possession of Florida on April 16. To the unseen and unhearing Indians, he delivered a formal declaration, in which he explained how the descendants of Adam and Eve had spread abroad across the earth to form many nations, and how God had come to earth to save the nations "wheresoever they might live and be." "Wherefore," he continued, ". . . I entreat and require you to understand this well which I have told you, taking the time for it that is just you should, to comprehend and reflect, and that you recognize the Church as Mistress and Superior of the Universe, and the Supreme Pontiff, called Pope . . . and that you consent and give opportunity that these Fathers and religious men may declare and preach these things to you."¹²

Narvaez and a large party of men marched northward, but unfortunately, they lost contact with the fleet, which, despairing of their return, turned back toward Cuba. Cut off from all supplies, the expedition reached the country of the Apalache Indians near the present site of Tallahassee. Unable to feed themselves off the land, their plight quickly became desperate. The men killed their horses for food and with crude tools constructed five large boats, which they launched in the Gulf, fifty men to a boat. Cabeza de Vaca relates the sad consequences: one after another, the boats foundered in the surf between Pensacola and Matagorda. Nearly all the men, including Narvaez, drowned. Eighty survivors were cast up on the Texas coast, but even this number dwindled through sickness, exposure, and starvation.

After an incredible odyssey of seven years, during which they actually crossed the continent, four lonely survivors finally reached Mexico and safety. Cabeza de Vaca was one of them, a Negro slave was another, and there were two soldiers. All the

12. Herrera, *Historia general*, I, 197, translated by Father Matthew Connolly. See also, Lowery, *Spanish Settlements*, 177 and note.

others, the priests included, had given their lives.

Don Hernando de Soto was thirty-eight years of age and already a knight commander of the Order of Santiago. A veteran of the campaigns in central America, having served under Francisco Pizarro in the conquest of the Incas, he decided, in 1538, to "conquer, pacify, and populate" the peninsula of Florida and, the lands extending westward to the Rio Grande. He was undaunted by the failure of the earlier expeditions led by Ponce de Leon and Narvaez, and the desperate tale told by Cabeza de Vaca only spurred him on to succeed where others had failed.

On April 6, 1538, de Soto sailed from San Lucar with ten ships and a company of 620 men.¹³ His cedula, or charter, from King Charles V stipulated that he take "priests who shall be appointed by us for the instruction of the natives of that province in our holy Catholic Faith, to whom you are to give and pay the passage, stores, and other necessary subsistence for them according to our condition." Twelve priests accompanied the expedition, eight secular and four regular. The names of only four of the secular missionaries are known: Fathers Dionisio de Paris, Rodrigo de Gallegos, Francisco del Pozo, and Diego de Banuelos.

After stopping for nearly a year in Cuba on the way, de Soto's fleet reached Florida's west coast on May 25, 1539, and laid anchor in Tampa Bay where Narvaez had also disembarked. De Soto named the bay Espiritu Santo - "Holy Spirit." On June 3, he landed and took formal possession of Florida with all the usual ceremonies.

There were no Indians to be seen. As the Spanish ships ap-

13. The de Soto expedition was related by an anonymous companion, the "Gentlemen of Elvas," *Relacam verdadeira dos trabalhos que ho governador Don Fernando de Souto y certos fidalgos portugueses passaram no descobrimento da provincia de Florida. Agora nouamente feita per hun fidalgo de Eluas* (Evora, Portugal, 1557). Another detailed account was written by Garcilaso de la Vega, "The Inca," *La Florida del Ynca. Historia Adelantado, Hernando de Soto, Governador, y Capitan General del Reyno de la Florida y de Otros Heroicos Caualleros. Espanoles e Indios* (Lisbon, 1601). The Elvas work was published in facsimile with an English translation by James Alexander Robertson, *True Relation of the Hardships Suffered by Governor Fernando de Soto & Certain Portuguese Gentlemen During the Discovery of the Province of Florida. Now newly set forth by a Gentleman of Elvas*. 2 vols. (DeLand, 1933). The most recent and best translation of "The Inca" is John Grier Varner and Jeannette Johnson Varner, *The Florida of The Inca* (Austin, 1951).

proached, the natives lit warning fires along the coast and fled into the brush. When two Indians captured by a Spanish patrol several months earlier for service as interpreters made their escape on the day of the landing, de Soto sent out two reconnoitering parties to capture other natives to serve as interpreters and to make a general exploration of the surrounding country. One patrol was led by Baltazar de Gallegos, a relative of Cabeza de Vaca.

On his arrival, de Soto heard of a Christian who was living with the Indians in a nearby village, and Gallegos was ordered to investigate. According to reports, the white man had come to Florida with Narvaez eleven years before. Gallegos and his eighty-man patrol returned after a severe ten-day march with the "Indian," whose body was painted in livid colors and who was carrying a bow and arrow. Gallegos had found this man some eight leagues [twenty miles] inland. When the "Indian" first saw the Spaniards, he was frightened and called out to the Holy Virgin to be spared. Apparently he was a Spanish Christian. A report on the incident was written by Luis Hernandez de Biedma, the king's representative on the expedition: "The Christian had lived twelve years among those Indians . . . and . . . even after he had been four days with us, he still could not put together a whole sentence in Spanish. . . . He was so little acquainted with the country that he know nothing about it farther than twenty leagues. . . ." ¹⁴ After a time, the Christian, Juan Ortiz, told his story. He had been enticed ashore from one of Narvaez ships by a group of Indians, who captured and enslaved him. The chief set him to work guarding the Indian dead from wild beasts, and on one occasion, Ortiz killed a wolf that had carried off the body of a child. Despite this, he was eventually condemned to die, but before the execution could take place, he escaped to a neighboring tribe where he found refuge. It was in this village that de Soto's patrol found him.

"When we realized that no gold was to be found here, we left the Port of Bahia Honda in order to move inland with all the men who had come, except for twenty-six horsemen and sixty footmen, who remained to guard the port until the Governor [de

14. Luis Hernandez de Biedma, "Relacion de la isla de la Florida," in Buckingham Smith (ed.), *Coleccion de varios Documentos para la Historia de la Florida y Tierras adyacentes* [1516-1794] (London, 1857), 47. Biedman translated by this writer.

Soto] should communicate with them or bid them to join him. . . . ”¹⁵ So wrote Biedma, the king’s representative. And so began, on July 15, 1539, an extraordinary exploration. De Soto, his priests and soldiers, and the repatriated “Indian” Juan Ortiz, left their west coast encampment and marched northward into the trackless continent. Only three years later, de Soto would be standing as far away as the Mississippi River.

In the first months, July to October, de Soto explored the center of the peninsula, passing through the regions of present-day Dade City, Ocala, Lake City, and Live Oak. In October, he reached the principal town of the Apalache Indians near the present city of Tallahassee, and there he passed the winter. On March 3, 1540, he broke camp and marched northward into that part of *La Florida* known today as Georgia. Within the next two years, his indomitable procession passed through the central and northern part of Georgia, circled through the western-most portions of the Carolinas, and traversed parts of Alabama, Louisiana, and possibly Texas.

The adventure was not without its casualties. Sickness and marauding Indians decimated de Soto’s company. Four of the secular priests died during the first year, and in a fierce battle with Mobilian Indians near the Alabama River on October 15, 1540, all the vestments, chalices, patens, altar furnishings, and wheat and wine needed for Mass were destroyed. The chronicler of de Soto’s adventures, Garcilaso de la Vega (“the Inca”), recorded the result: “Thereafter an altar was erected and adorned on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Standing at the altar, a priest, vested in ornaments made of hide, said the Confiteor, the Introit of the Mass, and the Oration, Epistle, and the Gospel, and all the rest up to the end of the Mass without consecrating. The Spaniards call this the *Missa seca* [‘Dry Mass’]; and the one who said the Mass or another priest read the Gospel and delivered a sermon on it. From this they derived consolation in the distress they felt at not being able to adore our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ under the sacramental species. This lasted almost for three years, up to the time they left Florida for the land of the Christians [Mexico].”¹⁶

15. *Ibid.*, 48.

16. This translation is by Father Michael Kenny, *The Romance of the*

Although de Soto sometimes used deception in his dealings with the Indians, reduced them to slavery when it served his purposes, and accepted Indian women for his own pleasure, it is also known that he sometimes assisted the priests in instructing Indian chiefs and tribesmen in the basic beliefs of Christianity. On one such occasion—by coincidence the same day, March 26, 1541, when his one-time commander, Francisco Pizarro, was assassinated in his palace in Peru—de Soto fashioned and raised a towering pine-tree cross at the town of Casqui on the western bank of the Mississippi, and proclaimed to the Indians of the place: “This was He who had created the sky and the earth and man in His own image. Upon the tree of the cross He had suffered to save the human race, and had risen from the grave on the third day . . . and, having ascended into heaven, was there with open arms to receive all that would be converted to Him.”¹⁷

At another west-bank Indian town named Tamaliseu, which de Soto reached three years after the start of his extraordinary overland journey, the explorer fell gravely ill, and appointed a successor, Luis de Moscoso, to lead the remainder of his men to safety. On May 21, 1542, he “confessed his sins with sorrow and compunction for having offended God,” and died. A group of soldiers wrapped the corpse in a mantle and bore it by canoe to the middle of the Mississippi. There, with the deepest reverence, they consigned the remains of their commander to the bed of the great river that he had discovered. A brave soldier, a man of invincible spirit and high resolve, he wrote one of the early chapters in Florida’s Catholic history.

On September 10, 1543, after a perilous journey by foot and on roughhewn brigantines, the 300 survivors reached Mexico and safety. Two secular priests, Rodrigo de Gallegos and Francisco del Pozo, two Dominicans, Juan de Gallegos and Luis de Soto, and one Franciscan, Juan de Torres, remained of the original band of twelve priests. Juan Ortiz, the Spanish Christian who had lived the life of the Florida Indian for eleven years, rested forever in the strange land of his captors. With the end of the de Soto expedition, Spain’s fourth great effort in *La Flor-*

Floridas (Milwaukee, 1934), 48. See also Varner and Varner, *Florida of The Inca*, 383.

17. Theodore Maynard, *De Soto and the Conquistadores* (New York, 1930), 236.

ida, there were still no permanent missions, and the mass of savages remained unconverted worshippers of sun and sky.

Luis Cancer de Barbastro was a priest of the Dominican Order, a native of Saragossa, Spain. In 1547, when he conceived the idea of going to Florida, he was already a veteran New World missionary and a proven success with the fierce savages of Guatemala, where he had spent the last four years. He was called "Alferez de la Fe" - Standard bearer of the Faith, and Guatemala, which Spaniards described as the "War Province" because of the warlike character of the natives, was known at the close of Father Cancer's short apostolate as "The Province of True Peace."

Cancer read the stories of earlier expeditions to the unconquered and unconverted land of Florida. He talked with survivors of those expeditions, and he began to wonder why could he not win over the Indians of Florida by the same means he had used in Guatemala? It seemed to him that the earlier missionaries to that northern province had been hampered rather than helped by the soldiers and armaments that accompanied them. He determined to try, by peaceable means alone, to convert the ignorant and seemingly untractable savages. In 1547, he asked for permission to form an expedition.

On December 28, 1547, a royal cedula addressed to Don Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy of Mexico, commanded him to provide Father Cancer with passage to his destination and all necessary supplies, including "whatsoever was needful for celebrating Mass." Early in 1549, the missionary set out from Vera Cruz, Mexico, on an unarmed vessel, the *Santa Maria de la Encina*.¹⁸ Three other Dominican priests, Fathers Gregorio de Beteta, Diego de Tolosa, and Juan Garcia, accompanied him. All were seasoned New World missionaries. Father Gregorio had labored for many years in Mexico and apparently had been the first Dominican to think seriously about the conversion of the Florida Indians. Once, with another Dominican, he had set out to walk from Miva, Mexico to the part of *La Florida* that lay north of Mexico, but was forced to turn back for want of supplies.

Cancer was convinced that his efforts would be fruitful only if he could work among natives who had not earlier been antag-

18. O'Daniel, *Dominicans in Early Florida*, 30-70, is the best account of the Cancer expedition.

onized by the use of armed force. He had therefore prevailed upon the viceroy of Mexico to issue the strictest orders to the pilot, Juan de Arana, to avoid all ports where Spaniards had previously landed. Arana, however, paid little heed to his orders or to the wishes of the friars. When on May 29, the shout of "land ahoy!" sounded from the topmast, the priests did not know it, but Arana had brought them to a point near Tampa Bay! - almost exactly where, not many years before, Narvaez and de Soto had landed and spread the terror of their arms.

Father Cancer and his companions leaned over the gunwales of their ship and searched the coastline for signs of Indians. Seeing none, Cancer decided to go ashore in a small landing boat. With him went Father Diego, a Spanish lay brother named Fuentes, an Indian woman interpreter named Magdalena, and Juan de Arana. Father Diego was the first to step ashore, and following Cancer's instructions, he climbed a tree to survey the surrounding country. As he did so, a band of fifteen to twenty Indians came out of the woods and approached the shoreline cautiously.

As soon as he saw the Indians, Cancer gathered up his habit, sprang into the sea, and ran ashore in water up to his cincture. "And Our Lord knows what haste I made," he wrote later, "lest they [the Indians] should slay the monk before hearing what we were about. Reaching the beach, I fall on my knees and prayed for grace and divine help; I ascend to the plain where I found them [the Indians] gathered and before reaching them repeated my actions on the beach, and rising from my knees begin to draw out of my [s]leeves some articles of Flanders, which though of small account and of little value to Christians were much prized by them and highly appreciated."

Cancer explained later: "I had read in the Doctors, particularly in St. Thomas, Victoria, Gaetano, that it is approved of and commended . . . to take to the unbelievers . . . little presents, such as these." He went on to describe what happened: "Then they [the Indians] approach me, and having given away part of what I brought with me, I go to the friar [Father Diego], who was coming toward me, and embrace him with much joy; we both kneel down with the Spaniard [Fuentes] and the Indian woman, and drawing out my book we recite the litanies, commending ourselves to Our Lord and to His Saints. The Indians kneeled,

others squatted, which greatly pleased me, and as they rose up I leave the litanies half said and sit down with them in a hut and I shortly learned where was the harbor we were in search of, which was about a day and a half's distance from there by land." ¹⁹

Father Cancer returned alone to the ship for more presents, but when he came ashore again he could not find his three companions. They had disappeared, and a sailor who had helped row the priest ashore was afterwards lured into the bush by Indians and was spirited away. Cancer spent the remainder of the day on shore trying to unravel the mystery, but at sunset, with no further word of their whereabouts, the priest sadly returned to his ship. The next day Cancer and Father Juan went ashore again, only to find that not only were their friends still missing, but the Indians of the area had disappeared as well.

Once again despairing of any word from the priests, Cancer returned with Father Juan to the ship. The sailors weighed anchor and set a northerly course for the harbor of which the natives had spoken. After eight days sailing along the coast and several more days of negotiating the entrance, Father Cancer's ship sailed into a bay where it seemed suitable to establish a permanent settlement and mission. On the feast of Corpus Christi, Fathers Cancer and Juan Garcia offered Mass on shore. The next day, Cancer with Father Gregorio searched diligently throughout the surrounding area for their lost companions, but with no success. Then, just as they were about to leave, they spotted Indians approaching, and heard one shout in broken Spanish: "Friends, friends! Good, good!"

The two priests cautiously approached the Indian emissaries, and responded to their overture. Father Cancer shouted: "We are good men!" and he indicated by signs that he wished the three Spaniards and Magdalena to be returned. The Indians agreed - but it was treachery. Father Diego and the lay brother Fuentes had been massacred, and the sailor had been made a slave.

19. "Relacion de la Florida para el Ilmo. Senor Visorrei de la Nueva Espana la qual trajo Fr. Gregorio de Beteta," in Smith (ed.), *Collecion de varios Documentos*, 199. On the authorship of this passage by Cancer, see note by O'Daniel, *Dominicans in Early Florida*, 62. This writer has used the translation of Lowrey, *Spanish Settlements*, 420.

Father Cancer learned this agonizing news after being deceived again, this time by Magdalena. The Indian girl appeared suddenly on the shore among a crowd of natives. She had shorn herself of her Christian clothing and had taken on the old habits of her Indian upbringing. Deceitfully, she told Father Cancer that the remainder of her "lost" party was enjoying the hospitality of the nearby chieftain, that she had convinced the Indians that the friars were on a peaceful mission, and that there were some fifty or sixty Indians gathered together to hear what the missionaries had to say.

Father Cancer returned to his ship, full of expectation for the morrow. On board, however, he met an incredible stranger—a white man - who carried a report that the priest's friends were dead. The man called himself Juan Munoz, and said that he was one of de Soto's soldiers, captured here ten years before. While Father Cancer was ashore, Munoz had escaped from his Indian master and had paddled out to the Spanish ship in a canoe. He reported that the Indians had slain Father Diego and the lay brother—he had seen the scalp of the priest himself - and held the sailor in bondage. Now came more bad news: the ship began to leak and it was far from shore, meat and fish were spoiling, water was running low, many of the crew were down with fever, and Juan de Arana, the pilot, had become increasingly fractious. Cancer found it hard to prevent Arana from withdrawing immediately from the area.

Cancer spent Monday, June 24, on board ship writing letters to his superiors, arranging the things he wanted to take ashore with him, and setting down his adventures to date in a journal. Much of our information about the expedition is from this journal. On Tuesday, he attempted to go ashore with a party of sailors, but the sea was too rough. The following day, the waters were still choppy, but by hard rowing Cancer and his party, including Father Gregorio and the de Soto campaigner, Juan Munoz, reached shore.

Before actually stepping on the beach, the priests saw Indians in the trees and a sizeable group on a nearby hillock, brandishing bows and arrows, clubs, and darts. Munoz shouted out a warning to the Indians to stop the hostile demonstration, but Cancer cautioned: "Be silent, Brother; do not provoke them." Father

Gregorio urged his superior: "For the love of God wait a little; do not land."²⁰

Father Canceo, however, leaped from the boat into the water and waded onto the beach. He called to the sailors to bring him a small crucifix that he had forgotten, and then walked toward the Indians on the hillock. Before reaching them, he fell on his knees for a moment in prayer. As he arose, several Indians rushed forward and pushed him down the hill. A crowd of savages gathered around him. One took away his hat, and another, with the vicious swipe of a club, killed him. And thus died a missionary and a martyr. Father Gregorio could not persuade Juan de Arana to remain any longer and the ship sailed to Mexico.

The year was now 1549, and still neither Spain nor the Church had a foothold in Florida. Although it seemed to some the essence of foolishness, Spanish priests and sea captains insisted on dreaming of a colony. True, every effort to build permanently had been repulsed by the Indians, and priests who had tried heaping charity on the heads of the recalcitrant savages had been cruelly slaughtered for their pains. Florida was too important, however, to write off. Not only did the state of the Indians demand continued missionary efforts, but Florida still loomed large as ever on navigators' maps as the strategic key to the Gulf and Caribbean trade routes.

Other reasons, too, caused the Spaniards to yearn after the elusive peninsula. Certain authorities in Cuba saw Florida as possessing unusual utilitarian value. So many native Cuban women had married Spanish soldiers, one of the bishops on the island reported, a Cuban male "is lucky if he can get a wife 80 years old." The suggestion was therefore made by some that Florida would be an excellent source of Indian wives. A permanent mission and outpost were essential, insisted the bishops and admirals in appeals to the king.

Faced with a growing number of persistent and authoritative appeals, Philip II decided to promote yet another voyage to Florida. To head the expedition the viceroy of Mexico chose Don Tristan de Luna y Arellano, son of the governor of Yucatan. Five priests and one lay brother, all members of the Order of St. Dominic, were appointed to accompany the expedition. The

20. *Ibid.*, 425.

colonists were instructed not to antagonize the Indians but "to settle, and by good example, with good works and with presents, to bring them to a knowledge of Our Holy Faith and Catholic Truth." The viceroy wrote to Philip in Spain, assuring him that the Dominicans named to the enterprise were chosen "because of their tried lives, learning, and doctrine," and because they were "of an age to be able to work among the Indians and learn their languages." Their names were Pedro de Feria, the superior, who resigned the priorship of the prospering house of St. Dominic in Mexico to undertake the Florida mission; Domingo de la Anunciacion, a scholar said to have mastered all the Mexican dialects; Domingo de Salazar, later bishop of the Philippines; Juan Mazuelas and Diego de San Domingo, both veterans of the Mexican missions; and Bartolome Mateos, the lay brother who had served as an artillery officer with Pizarro in Peru.²¹

Accounts differ regarding the size of de Luna's expedition that set sail from Vera Cruz, Mexico, on June 11, 1559. One account lists eleven ships carrying 500 soldiers, 1,000 settlers, and 248 horses; another lists fifteen ships carrying 1,500 soldiers and settlers, including women and children. The chronicles agree, however, on the main events. Favored by winds and weather, the expedition reached Florida's Gulf coast after a month of sailing and on the eve of the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 14, the party landed at Pensacola Bay. De Luna wrote to King Philip: "I set sail on June 11, and until the day of our Lady of August, when it pleased God that the entire fleet should enter the port of Ichuse. As we entered on the day I say, I named the bay in your honor as Bahia Filipina del Puerto de Santa Maria."

So pleased was de Luna with the land he saw that he sent a shipload of settlers immediately to Spain in order to persuade others to come join his colony. The rest of the settlers were divided into two groups. De Luna sent the first group to reconnoiter the countryside by land; the second went up a nearby river by small boats. Dominican priests accompanied both groups. De

21. See Herbert Ingram Priestly (ed.), *The Luna Papers, Documents Relating to the Expedition of Don Tristan de Luna y Arellano for the Conquest of La Florida in 1559-1561*, 2 vols. (DeLand, 1928). The Dominican priests on the expedition are treated in O'Daniel, *Dominicans in Early Florida*, 130-81, 189-201.

Luna instructed the reconnaissance parties to return to the harbor within three or four days, with the consequence that the men took with them only enough food for that length of time. The reconnaissance lasted longer than expected but produced nothing of importance; the Spaniards saw only marshes and barren land. Food gave out after several days, and many fell sick from eating roots and inedible leaves. As the parties made their way back toward shore, they saw churning black clouds piling up on the horizon.

A fierce tropical storm, likely a hurricane, bore down on the harbor. Towering waves snapped anchor cables and battered the planks of all but two of the ships into debris. Driving waves struck the beach and those on shore fled inland for their lives. Many died, including the Dominican lay brother, Mateos. For the survivors, almost nothing remained of their store of provisions - enough food for a year had sailed in those ships - nor of their pieces of gold and other articles of value that they intended to use in trading with the Indians.

De Luna gathered the survivors and urged them to continue the colony at all costs. He left a captain with fifty men to guard the port and the two remaining ships and set out in search of food. The story of the colony for the next year and a half was a story of successive expeditions for this purpose, and of intermittent periods of raw hunger when priests and soldiers were reduced to eating their horses and chewing the leather of their harnesses.

De Luna sent his ships for help. In the meantime, dissension broke out among de Luna, the master of the camp, and the captains of the destroyed vessels. At issue was the question of whether another reconnaissance force should be sent into the interior. Fathers Domingo de la Anunciacion and Domingo de Salazar were troubled by the outburst of argument and anger, and they attempted to restore peace to the settlement by leading the soldiers and settlers each day in recitation of a litany. It was the Easter season, and the two priests were afraid that many of the people, with anger and hatred in their hearts, would not be able to receive the sacraments of penance and Holy Communion worthily. Father Domingo de la Anunciacion decided to risk a prophecy. During the offering of Mass at the beachhead at Ichuse (Ochuse) on Palm Sunday of 1561, he turned suddenly toward the people, with the sacred host in his hand and addressed de Luna, ques-

tioning the governor about his faith. The governor stepped forward, knelt before the altar, and answered the priest's questions humbly. Father Domingo told de Luna that if he would become reconciled with the captains and repent his sin in causing dissension and suffering among the people, before three days a ship would arrive in port with help to relieve the hunger of the colony. The governor was so struck by the confidence in the priest's voice, he turned to the congregation and announced his belief in the prophecy. While Father Domingo finished the Mass, the governor confessed aloud before all the people that he had been wrong. He asked the captains, the master of the camp, the soldiers, and the settlers to forgive him, and a reconciliation among everyone present followed before the altar.

And lo, on the following day a ship appeared on the horizon. It was from New Spain and was laden with supplies for the settlement. To the Spaniards it seemed that Father Domingo's prayer - and prophecy - had been answered. The vessel was commanded by Angel de Villafane appointed by the viceroy to replace de Luna. With Villafane, was Father Gregorio de Beteta, who had accompanied the ill-fated expedition of Father Cancer eleven years before. Villafane stayed only a short time in Florida. Then, leaving a garrison of fifty men at Ichuse, he left for Mexico by way of Havana carrying the remainder of de Luna's colony, numbering less than 300 persons. Father Domingo remained in Florida for six or seven months until it was determined that the settlement was definitely not capable of surviving. He and the soldiers then returned to Mexico. Thus, another attempt to settle and Christianize Florida reached an inglorious end.

In Spain, consternation greeted the news of the failure of Tristan de Luna's colony. The crown was miffed because, despite six well-planned attempts to do so, the banner of Castile and Leon had still not been permanently planted in the elusive sands of Florida. Military and naval leaders were frustrated and embarrassed by the failure to secure and hold a beachhead. That the arrows of primitive Indians had succeeded in driving off Spanish warriors on several notable occasions was humble pie that proud conquistadors were not prepared to eat. The gold that the hidalgos hunted in the El Dorado of dreams never seemed less real than it did among the bogs and swamps of Florida, and those Spaniards

who disguised their greed for precious metal under the mantle of religion found that evil indeed was its own punishment.

No one was more disappointed, however, than the bishops and priests of Spain - mission-minded men who saw in Florida a field of souls ripe for the harvest. Every attempted mission to the Indians in this far-off country had proved to be as unstable and as impermanent as the tides that lapped the shores. Indeed, the historian of the abortive de Luna mission, Agustin Davila y Padilla, recorded that there was only one convert, an Indian woman of the Coosa nation baptized at the point of death.²² Despite the best efforts of the gallant, devoted, and self-sacrificing priests who endured great privations in the American wild, and set up their crosses and preached their faith as best they could during temporary halts along the overland treks, the Florida Indians remained plunged in idolatry and ignorance. When would the priest have another chance? Not for some time, decided Philip II.

On September 23, 1561, the king expressed doubt that the province of Florida was any longer worth the effort or the expense of colonization. Unless some crisis of state demanded it, there would be no further attempts to settle the peninsula. In this decision the king was largely influenced by an admiral named Pedro Menendez de Aviles, captain-general of the Spanish fleet, who argued that Florida's shoreline was too low and sandy, her countryside too poor in resources, and her harbors too shallow to permit practicable settlement.²³ A permanent settlement and mission should wait until the right man and the right moment came-when there was sufficient zeal on the one hand and sufficient

22. Agustin Davila y Padilla, O.P., *Historia de la Fundacion y Discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de Mexico* (Mexico, 1596), 275.

23. See the transcript, "Parecer que da a S.M. el Consejo de la Neuva Espana, en virtud de su Real Cedula [fecha en Madrid a 23 de Septiembre de 1561] que sigue, sobre la forma en que estava la costa de la Florida, y que no convenia aumentar la Poblacion," in Buckingham Smith Collection (New York Public Library) vol. 1561-1593, 11. The royal cedula was addressed to the viceroy of New Spain, Don Luis de Velasco. It advised him of the opinion of Menendez, and stated, ". . . querido antes de tomar resolucion alguna, tener relacion y parecer vuestro de ello. . . ." Velasco called a meeting of navigators, who agreed that, ". . . que hasta que se sepa y entienda lo que es aquella costa y tierra, no convendria que S.M. gastare mucho en ella. . . ." The navigators went on to recommend that if any future settlement efforts be deemed necessary, they be limited to the Florida coastline north of 35°, the region of Cape Hatteras.

urgency on the other. The right moment would come, for example, if suddenly some new factor endangered Spanish shipping in the Bahama Channel along Florida's east coast.

The Spanish treasure fleets sailed twice each year from Havana, where the gold-laden galleons and caravels joined together for mutual protection. The fleets passed northward through the Bahama Channel, or Straits of Florida as it was also called, until they reached the area of Bermuda, when they set course for the Azores. From there to Seville the fleets were heavily guarded by men of war to prevent their capture by French pirates. The greatest danger on the voyage, however, came from navigating the Bahama Channel. This passage, discovered by Ponce de Leon on his first expedition, was only thirty-nine miles wide at its narrowest part; its waters were uncommonly rough, reefs at its entrance threatened the keels of heavily laden ships, and violent storms sometimes whipped the channel into cauldrons. Various wrecks along the coast attested the channel's terrors to Spanish navigators.²⁴ What then, if in addition to these natural hazards, French pirates should also infest this channel? And what if Menendez de Aviles should change his mind?

What was only a worry in the mind of the Spanish king in 1561 became a reality in the summer of 1564, when French adventurers under Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere preempted the northeast coastline of peninsular Florida and began construction of a military stockade, Fort Caroline. The outpost was situated near the mouth of the River of May (St. Johns) where it commanded the northern discharge of the Bahama Channel and enabled French warships to sally forth against the treasure fleets with dangerous ease.²⁵ Laudonniere's force consisted of soldiers, sailors, and artisans. No clergy or farmers were included. The presence of this force constituted a direct challenge to the claims of Spain in Florida, which had been recognized at least implicitly by France in the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis in 1559. Here, no doubt, was a crisis of state capable of changing the decision of a king and the mind of an admiral. When Philip learned in the

24. Ernesto Schafer, "Comunicaciones maritimas y terrestres de las Indias espanolas," *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, III (Seville, 1946), 969-83.

25. The story of this fort has been told recently by Charles E. Bennett, *Laudonniere & Fort Caroline: History and Documents* (Gainesville, 1964).

spring of 1565, that Jean Ribault, the great French sea captain, was assembling a fleet to reinforce Fort Caroline, he reacted angrily to what he considered a foreign encroachment on the Spanish domain, and ordered a fleet to be assembled at once to repel Ribault, destroy Fort Caroline, secure Florida for Spain, and establish there, at long last, a permanent Catholic community.²⁶ He sent again for Pedro Menendez.

Admiral Menendez had served long and faithfully in the arduous campaigns of the Low Country and with the fleets that sailed regularly to and from New Spain. He knew the ports of the West Indies, the currents of the Caribbean, and the inviting shoreline of Florida. He also knew that Florida was populated with Indians whom no missionaries had yet been able to convert and hold, for lack of a permanent mission base. He thought of Spain's economic dependancy upon the treasure fleets, of the spiritual dangers to Florida's Indians that would come from "heretical" Frenchmen (most of the colonists were Huguenots), and of the good that he himself could do as special viceroy of the church in that as yet unconquered and savage province. He told the king that he would go and accepted the office of *Adelantado de la Florida*.²⁷

The royal patent given Menendez on March 20, 1565, plainly charged him with a missionary as well as a military responsibility: "As we have in mind the good and the salvation of those [Indian] souls, we have decided to give the order to send religious persons to instruct the said Indians, and those other people who are good Christians and our subjects, so that they may live among and talk to the natives there may be in those lands and provinces of Florida, and that [the Indians] by intercourse and conversation with them may more easily be taught our Holy Catholic Faith and be

26. "Real Cedula original de S.M. por la que hace cierta capitulacion y asiento con Pedro Menendez de Aviles, sobre la Poblacion de la Provincia de la Florida; su fha. 20 de Marzo de 1565, rubricada de los Sres. del Consejo y refrendada de Franc^o. de Eraso Secret^o. de S.M.," Revillagigedo Papers, Archivo del Conde de Revillagigedo, Casa de Canalejas, legajo 2, document no. 5. Cited hereafter as Revillagigedo Papers; all documents cited Revillagigedo Papers are on microfilm in the Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine.

27. The nature of the title, *adelantado*, and the difference between it and *gobernador*, are discussed in C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1963), 20-21.

brought to good usages and customs, and perfect polity brought to good usages and customs, and perfect polity.”²⁸

On June 29, 1565, Menendez sailed from Cadiz with nineteen ships and 1,100 men, bound for Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the east coast of Florida. Almost at once his fleet encountered severe storms which forced its return. Several days later when the storms had abated he set sail again, this time with an enlarged company of 1,504 soldiers, sailors, locksmiths, millers, silver-smiths, tanners, sheepshearers, and farmers, some with their wives and children. An additional 1,000 soldiers and settlers were to follow later from Asturias and Biscay. Menendez had the good sense to recruit men skilled in tilling the soil, animal husbandry, and the hunting of game. It was for lack of these skills that earlier expeditions had shown such lamentable inability to live off the land.

Chief among the passengers were “four secular priests with faculties to hear confessions.” In these four lay the Church’s hope of planting the Cross permanently in Florida’s sands. The names of only three are known: Francisco Lopez de Mendoza Grajales, Rodrigo Garcia de Trujillo, and Pedro de Rueda. As the Spanish vessels plowed westward across the Atlantic, Father Lopez, fleet chaplain, made notes of the voyage,²⁹ and recorded their arrival at the Canary Islands on Wednesday, July 5, where the ships took on wood and water. The following Sunday the fleet raised sail again for the island of Dominica in the Caribbean.

Gonzalo Solis de Meras, brother-in-law of Menendez, also made notes of the voyage: “Having set sail from the Canaries, within a short time a fierce tempest arose, and the flagship with

28. “Real Cedula. . .,” Revillagigedo Papers, legajo 2, document no. 5. The translation is by Connor, *Menendez de Aviles*, 259, altered by this author.

29. “Memoria del buen suceso y buen Viaje que dios nro señor fue servido de dar a la armada que salio de la ciudad de caliz para la provincia y costa de la florida de la qual fue por general el Illustre señor pero menendez de auiles comendador de la orden de santiago, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (cited hereafter as AGI), estante 1, cajon 1, legajo 1-19. The memorial has been translated into French and several times into English. This writer follows the translation of B. F. French (ed.), *Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida*, Second Series (New York, 1875), 191-234, which compares favorably with the Spanish transcription published by Eugenio Ruidiaz y Caravia, *La Florida: su conquista colonizacion por Pedro Menendez de Aviles*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1893), II, 74-84.

a patache broke away from the armada, without being seen any more; and the next day a shallop turned back to land, for she was leaking badly and could not be succored.”³⁰ Only five vessels remained together. Lopez was on one of these ships and he noted that: “the five vessels which remained of our fleet had a prosperous voyage the rest of the way, thanks to Our Lord and His Blessed mother. Up to Friday, the 20th we had very fine weather, but at ten o’clock that day a violent wind arose, which by two in the afternoon had become the most frightful hurricane one could imagine. The sea, which rose to the very clouds, seemed about to swallow us up alive, and such was the fear and apprehension of the pilot and other sailors, that I exerted myself to exhort my brethren and companions to repentance. I represented to them the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, His justice and His mercy, and with so much success that I passed the night in confessing them.”³¹

On August 5 the ships sighted the island of Dominica and put ashore for water. Three days later the crew weighed anchor and set a compass heading for San Juan de Puerto Rico, which they reached on August 9. In the harbor they sighted four other ships of their scattered fleet, including the flagship, *San Pelayo*. “Loud cries of joy resounded on all sides,” Lopez wrote, “and we

30. The Solis notes were incorporated into a biography of Menendez. This biography, “El proceso adjunto es relativo a las jornadas y sucesos del Adelantado D. Pedro Menendez de Aviles, de la conquista de la Florida, como fueron ganados los fuertes, la armada Francesa y degollado Juan Ribao General del Rey de Francia con todo su gente, allanado y sugetado los Yndios y Caciques de aquellas provincias plantando en ellas la fe catolica, escrito por el Dr. Solis de Meras, cunado de dicho Adelantado,” is part of the Revillagigedo Papers, legajo 2, document no. 2. This writer follows the translation of Jeannette Thurber Connor (ed.), *Pedro Menendez de Avile's, Adelantado, Governor and Captain-General of Florida. Memorial by Gonzalo Solis de Meras* (DeLand, 1923), 77. There are two other sources for the voyage of Menendez and the subsequent foundation of St. Augustine: a letter from Menendez to Philip II, St. Augustine, September 11, 1565, the original of which is in the AGI, 54-5-16, and a biography of Menendez completed in 1567 by Bartolome Barrientos, professor in the University of Salamanca, “Vida y hechos de Pero Menendez de Auiles, Cauallero de la Hordem de Sanctiango, Adelantado de la Florida: Do largamente se tratan las Conquistas y Poblaciones de la Prouincia de la Florida, y como fueron libradas de los Luteranos que dellas se auian apoderado.” The Barrientos account was published by Genaro Garcia (ed.), *Dos antiguas relaciones de la Florida* (Mexico, 1902).

31. French, *Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida*, 193.

thanked the Lord that he had permitted us to find each other again, but it would be impossible for me to tell how it all happened.”³²

The voyagers paused several days in Puerto Rico to replenish their store of provisions and to take on board additional men that the king had agreed to furnish from the island garrison. Father Lopez was asked to remain by Puerto Rican settlers. They offered him an attractive pastorate, but he refused: “I wanted to see if by refusing a personal benefit for the love of Jesus, He would not grant me a greater, since it is my desire to serve Our Lord and His blessed mother.”³³

With approval from all hands, Menendez weighed anchor and led his few ships to sea again, northward toward the Bahama Channel. On Monday, August 27, Father Lopez noted: While we were near the entrance to the *Bahama Channel*, God showed to us a miracle from heaven. About nine o'clock in the evening, a comet appeared, which showed itself directly above us, a little eastward, giving so much light that it might have been taken for the sun. It went towards the west - that is, towards Florida, and its brightness lasted long enough to repeat two *Credos*.”³⁴

The next day the voyagers sighted land. It was Cabo de Cavernaval, present-day Cape Kennedy, the thin finger of land that projects out from the center of Florida's east coast. It was “August 28, St. Augustine's Day,” wrote Solis de Meras, “on which they sighted the land of Florida; all of them kneeling, saying the *Te Deum Laudamus*, they praised Our Lord, all the people repeating their prayers, entreating Our Lord to give them victory in all things.” According to Father Lopez, “thanks to God and the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, we soon had the pleasure of seeing land . . . and found ourselves actually in Florida. . . .”³⁵

Coasting along northward, the voyagers reached, September 4, the harbor of the River of Dolphins, which had been described by Laudonniere and which the Indians called Seloy. It was, wrote Solis de Meras, “a good harbor, with a good beach, to which he [Menendez] gave the name of San Augustine,”³⁶ because that saint's feast was the day on which he had first sighted land. Men-

32. *Ibid.*, 198.

33. *Ibid.*, 199.

34. *Ibid.*, 208.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Connor, *Menendez de Aviles*, 83.

endez proceeded still farther up the coast, reaching the mouth of the River May (St. Johns) where he sighted four French warships -reinforcements for Fort Caroline. Jean Ribault had won the race from Europe.

Worried that the enemy force was strong enough to prevent the founding of a Spanish settlement, the adelantado's council of advisors urged him to return to the Caribbean to await the balance of his fleet. Menendez, however, decided to engage the French ships at once. A brief and inconsequential battle followed. Father Lopez noted that, "notwithstanding all the guns we fired at them, we did not sink one of their ships."³⁷ The Spaniards, also, withdrew with no losses. Menendez was pleased; he had satisfied his military honor. He decided now to retire, particularly since he knew that the French had five more warships in the river. He turned the bows of his ships southward toward the newly named harbor of St. Augustine, and arrived there, just off the Indian village of Seloy, on September 6.

Father Lopez described the landing: "On Saturday, the 8th, the general landed with many banners spread, to the sound of trumpets and salutes of artillery. As I had gone ashore the evening before, I took a cross and went to meet him, singing the hymn, *Te Deum laudamus*. The general marched up to the cross, followed by all who accompanied him, and there they all kneeled and embraced the cross. A large number of Indians watched these proceedings and imitated all they saw done."³⁸ A solemn Mass was then offered in honor of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Solis de Meras records that after Mass, "the Adelantado had the Indians fed and dined himself.' It was the first community act of religion and thanksgiving in the first permanent settlement in the land. It was also the beginning of the parish of St. Augustine and of the permanent service of the Catholic Church in what is now the United States.

Menendez wrote home to Philip II three days later: "As for myself, Your Majesty may be assured that if I had a million [ducats] more or less, I would spend it all upon this undertaking, because it is of such great service to God Our Lord, for the increase of our Holy Catholic Faith, and for the service of Your

37. French, *Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida*, 212.

38. *Ibid.*, 218-19.

Majesty. And therefore, I have offered to Our Lord all that He may give me in this world, all that I may acquire and possess, in order to plant the Gospel in this land for the enlightenment of its natives; and in like manner I pledge myself to Your Majesty.”³⁹

The Spaniards christened their landing site *Nombre de Dios* - Name of God - by which name it is still known today.⁴⁰ Shortly after the landing, Menendez and his priests erected there the first Christian mission to the American Indian. From that place, for 198 uninterrupted years, priests and laymen would carry Christianity and civilization into the wild interior: first diocesan, then Jesuit, and finally Franciscan missionaries would drop their lamps into the darkness as far as Virginia to the north and Texas in the west, and write their names into one of the least known but heroic chapters of American and Catholic history. The story of their labors must be pieced together from royal decrees, memorials, reports, letters, and fragments of a similar nature. But there is enough information of this kind to support the judgment that the Spanish mission system in Florida, which could count 26,000 Christian Indians by 1655, was one of the most successful efforts for the material amelioration and spiritual development of backward peoples that the American nation has experienced.

Other fruits of the Menendez enterprise are less satisfying in retrospect. Although it startles the naive to learn that men warred mercilessly against each other in the sixteenth century as they do unremittingly in our own, it is a fact that Menendez accomplished with dispatch the military portion of his mission. He destroyed the French on land and on sea. Marching overland in mid-September, Menendez captured Fort Caroline and slew the entire garrison, excepting the women, children, and youths not under

39. Menendez to Philip II, St. Augustine, September 11, 1565, AGI, 54-5-16.

40. See “Plano del Presidio de Sⁿ Agustin de la Florida . . . ,” executed by Juan Joseph Elixio de la Puente, dater February 16, 1769, and preserved in the Museo Naval, Madrid. The key indicates the site and reads in part: “Place called Nombre de Dios, which is the same where the first Mass was said on September 8, 1565, when the Spaniards under the command of the Adelantado Pedro Menendez de Aviles set out to conquer these provinces; and afterward an Indian village was built there, with a chapel in which was placed an image of Maria Santisima de la Leche.” Translated by this writer.

arms. Father Lopez observed that the Spaniards "found many packs of playing cards with the figure of the Host and Chalice on the backs, and many saints with crosses on their shoulders and other playing cards burlesquing things of the Church." Later, capturing Jean Ribault and two groups of shipwrecked soldiers south of St. Augustine, and after exacting their unconditional surrender, Menendez "gave them to the sword" with the same sangfroid of French cruiser captains off the coast of Holland, of Jacques Sorie who had slaughtered the residents of Havana several years before, and of Dominique de Gourges who would wreak French revenge upon the Spanish occupiers of Fort Caroline only three years later.

"Some persons considered him cruel," wrote Solis de Meras, "and others, that he had acted as a very good captain should."⁴¹ Historians of Spanish Florida are still judging him both ways. Discharge of his mandate, military necessity, inability to feed the French captives from his meager stores-over a hundred Spaniards would die from starvation during the coming winter-these appear to have been the reasons which led Menendez to carry out his instructions so completely. Although France and Spain were not formally at war, police actions of this sort were common occurrences where national ambitions collided in foreign lands or on the seas. These were cruel times; to Menendez it seemed necessary in this instance to sacrifice mercy to justice, and if that marked him with "an indelible stain," as the Catholic historian John Gilmary Shea concluded in the last century, it was the sole stain on an otherwise admirable breastplate.

In 1572, Menendez left Florida for Spain to direct the organization of an "invincible armada" with which Spain hoped to clear the Flanders coast of pirates. He had crossed the ocean seven times in the interest of his colony. Now he crossed it for the last time, exhausted and impoverished - St. Augustine and Florida had cost him his health and his entire personal fortune. Apparently, he counted it no special loss. A soldier in his command said of him, "He considered nothing but the service of God and of his Majesty, without looking to human interests." On September 8, 1574, while busy with his fleet at Santander in northern Spain, the adelantado wrote to his nephew in Florida: "After the

41. Connor, *Menendez de Avile's*, 123.

salvation of my soul, there is nothing in this world that I desire more than to see myself in Florida, to end my days saving souls . . . that is all my longing and happiness. May Our Lord do this as he can, and may he see that it is needful.”⁴²

But nine days later the conqueror of Florida was dead. The sunburnt, bearded body was removed from its steel corselets and dressed, according to his wish, in the simple habit of a Franciscan. Only the gentler side of his nature showed to those who viewed his remains. But the epitaph that was placed upon his grave at Aviles had the sound of trumpets. For to such a man, Spaniards insisted, the Nation owed a monument, History a book, and the Muses a poem. He had planted the Cross, and it would perdure.

42. Quoted in *ibid.*, appendix C, 255-56.