Isabella I of Spain

When Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile married in 1469, they united their two kingdoms to create a united Spain. Although the country itself was united, the people were not. The majority of the population consisted primarily of Spaniards; however there was also a large Muslim and Jewish population living in Spain that did not sit well with Isabella. She felt that in order to ensure political unity, she needed religious unity, as in Catholicism, which required the Muslims and Jews to leave Spain. The main thesis is that Isabella used her Catholic faith to reinforce her strong military leadership in the fight against the Muslims and Jews in Spain.

In order to successfully achieve their religious and political unity, Isabella and Ferdinand instituted the Reconquista. This way, Spain could be rid anyone that wasn’t Catholic because in Isabella’s eyes, being a true Spaniard meant being a true Catholic. As a result, anyone not Catholic was either supposed to convert to Catholicism or leave Spain. If people refused to do either, they would be put to death. So some Muslims and Jews did convert to Catholicism for appearance’s sake, but behind closed doors, they would still continue practicing their own religion. “Spanish churchmen urged Queen Isabella to petition the Pope to institute an Inquisition to stamp out the heresy of insincere converts. The deep religious convictions of the Queen made her open to such suggestions. King Ferdinand, on the other hand, was attracted to the idea because of the wealth that could be taken from the converts. Also, since there was hardly a noble

1David Fintz Altabé, “The Significance of 1492 to the Jews and Muslims of Spain” Hispania 75, no. 3 (September 1992): 729
2Peggy Liss, “Isabel la Católica: Topics and Topicality” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies (1457-3839) 85, no. 3 (June 2008): 261
3Peggy Liss, “Isabel la Católica: Topics and Topicality,” 261
family in Spain that had not intermarried with Jews, the Inquisition would render the nobility too frightened to defy his authority.”¹ As shown by the previous quote, both Isabella and Ferdinand wanted the Muslims and Jews out of Spain, but they were fueled by different desires. Ferdinand was acting like a true king when his first thoughts were about taking the wealth from the “insincere converts” and displaying his authority over the nobility in doing so, but Isabella, as the deeply pious Catholic that she was, was thinking with her faith foremost in her mind when making the decision to create the Reconquista.

Upon instituting the Reconquista, Isabella and Ferdinand didn’t just sit back and watch everything take place. They were very active in the pursuit of Muslims and Jews in Spain. They traveled along with their troops to fight the Muslims and Isabella even led her troops into battle. “Leaving aside the seeming anomaly of a woman venturing into a male domain for the moment, by that fact Isabel presented herself within a divinely-instituted historical process as a sanctified agent entrusted by God with absolute political authority in her realm and a mission to lead her people in advancing history’s destined end.”² Isabella felt it was her responsibility to rid Spain of Muslims and that’s why she took such an active role in the exterminating. “As Queen, she constructed it her duty to rule a Christian Spain divinely entrusted with continuing the biblical story, with heading a New Israel and leading the world to its messianic and perhaps its millennial finale, an anticipated time of one shepherd and one flock.”³ As stated previously, she felt God gave her the right to create a unified Spain and by using that as her reasoning, she and Ferdinand traveled through Spain conquering land from the Muslims and Jews.

¹David Fintz Altabé, “The Significance of 1492 to the Jews and Muslims of Spain” Hispania 75, no. 3 (September 1992): 729
²Peggy Liss, “Isabel la Católica: Topics and Topicality” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies (1457-3839) 85, no. 3 (June 2008): 261
³Peggy Liss, “Isabel la Católica: Topics and Topicality,” 261
Isabella and Ferdinand were very successful in conquering Muslim and Jewish lands to increase the size of Spain, but their crowning achievement comes in 1492 with the acquisition of the Muslim city of Granada. Granada had the largest Muslim population in all of Spain and having that fall to the Catholic king and queen would be disastrous for any other renegade Muslims still living in Spain. In 1492, the royal troops of Isabella and Ferdinand attacked the city of Granada and forced the Muslim ruler to surrender. “Although it would be Ferdinand leading the troops into battle, the royal chroniclers portrayed the campaign as Isabella’s war: “By the solicitude of this Queen was begun, and by her diligence was continued, the war against the Moors, until all of Granada was won.” However, Isabella would stay near the troops and when Ferdinand would have to go back to Aragon to conduct business, Isabella would be the one to lead them to battle. After Isabella and Ferdinand conquered Granada, they ordered all the Muslims and Jews to leave Spain. “After the King had captured the city of Granada from the Moors, and it had surrendered to him on the 7th [2d] of January of the year just mentioned, he ordered the expulsion of all the Jews in all parts of his kingdom-in the kingdoms of Castile, Catalonia, Aragon, Galicia, Majorca, Minorca, the Basque provinces, the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, and the kingdom of Valencia. Even before that the Queen had expelled them from the kingdom of Andalusia… About their number there is no agreement, but, after many inquiries, I found that the most generally accepted estimate is 50,000 families, or, as others say, 53,000.”

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The main thesis was how Queen Isabella I of Spain used her Catholic faith to fuel her desire to create a unified Spain by disposing all of the Muslims and Jews. This can be shown through Isabella wanting religious unity in order to achieve political unity and thus instituting the Reconquista to remove the minorities. By doing this, she and her husband Ferdinand were able to unify Spain and create a prosperous monarchy using Catholicism.

**Works Cited**


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2 Peggy Liss, “Isabel la Católica: Topics and Topicality” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies (1457-3839) 85, no. 3 (June 2008): 261
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