

Sparring with the pen: religious polemics and apologetics between Jews, Christians and Muslims (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries).

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"Sons and daughters of Abraham": such is the term often used to denote Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who trace their spiritual ascendancy back to the Patriarch Abraham. Yet part of this common heritage is a legacy of exclusivity and conflict: devotees of each of the three religions claim unique, or at least superior, adherence to the true religion practised by the patriarchs. From earliest times, religious scholars sought to stake out their claims to religious legitimacy through the exegesis of key religious texts (Bible, Koran, Talmud, Hadith, writings of the Church Fathers) and through the use of philosophy and science. The goal was to prove oneself right and the other wrong: the line between apologetic (defensive) and polemic (offensive) was thin indeed. Salvos of oral argumentation and written diatribes went back and forth between members of the three religions, and also between rival strands of each of the three religions: Rabbanite and Karaite Jews, "orthodox" and "heretical" Christians, Sunni and Shii Muslims, etc. The polemic was all the more crucial because it touched the foundations of medieval social and political organization: rulers, Christian or Muslim, affirmed their God-given right to exercise power and to subordinate and protect religious minorities. These minorities (be they Christians under Muslim rule, Muslims under Christian rule, or Jews under either) used polemics and apologetics to define and justify their own role amid the dominant society and to attempt to dissuade their members from converting to the majority religion. While in theory one can distinguish between apologetics (defence of one's own faith) and polemics (attacks on a rival faith), in reality the two are inextricably mixed.

The courts of the Umayyad caliphs at Damascus and of the Abbasids at Baghdad were the theatres of learned disputations between Jews, Christians and Muslims: indeed Muslim theology evolved out of these conflicts, in reaction and response to Jewish and Christian polemics and interrogations, just as Christian theology had evolved in the face of Jewish and pagan criticism. In the Iberian peninsula in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the kingdoms of Portugal, Castile-León, Aragon-Catalonia, and the Almoravid and Almohad empires fought over the remnants of the *taifas*, sparking the displacement or conversion of many people, a number of authors wrote polemical-apologetic works: Muslim Ibn Hazm's (994-1064) *Fisal* is a massive and erudite attack on Jewish and Christian scripture; Jew Judah Ha-Levy's *Kuzari* rejects Christianity, Islam, and philosophical speculation for the timeless truths of the Torah; Petrus Alfonsi, convert from Judaism to Christianity,

attacks the Talmud and the Koran in his *Dialogues against the Jews*, affirming that Christianity alone is consistent with the truths of philosophy, science and revelation.

The period that interests us here, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, brought fresh upheavals in the Mediterranean world: the collapse of the Almohad caliphate and the expansion of Northern Christian rule over thousands of Andalusi Muslims; the expulsion of Jews from France (in 1306 and again in 1394), from Spain (1492); the failure of the Crusades and the end of the Latin states of the Levant; the rise of the Mamluks and subsequently of the Ottomans. Again, massive migrations and conversions ensued; to make sense of these events, and to defend their ancestral religions (or to justify their conversion to a rival religion), Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the period wrote fresh works of apologetics and polemics. It is beyond the scope of this article to catalogue, much less examine in detail, the scores of texts composed during this period. I will instead focus on some of the more interesting and important texts to give a feel for how interreligious relations evolved over this period.

For the Latin west, the new mendicant orders provided fresh impetus for mission and polemics with Judaism and Islam. Both Francis of Assisi and Domingo de Guzman made preaching a central part of their mission; the Franciscan and Dominican orders they established sent their friars to preach both to wayward Christians and to infidels. Yet the strategies of the two orders, as they evolved over the thirteenth centuries, were strikingly different. Francis of Assisi travelled to Egypt in 1219, as the armies of the fifth crusade were besieging Damietta, and crossed over the enemy lines to preach to the Egyptian Sultan al-Kâmil: his goal, if we are to believe the most reliable sources, was martyrdom. After all, Francis preached and practised the *vita apostolica*, or apostolic life: he and his friars sought in everything to live like the apostles, a life of poverty, prayer, penance, and preaching. What could be more appropriate than to take this life to its logical conclusion: to go to the infidel, as did the apostles, preach to them, and receive the sublime crown of martyrdom at their hands? Yet al-Kâmil was not interested in making a martyr of Francis: he received him graciously, listened to him politely, offered him gifts (which Francis of course refused), then sent him safely back to the crusaders' camp. Francis had to return, alive, to Italy.

Yet where Francis failed, the following year five of his brothers were more successful. These Franciscans went first to Seville and preached in the mosque, insulting Muhammad and the Koran. For this they were imprisoned and subsequently sent to the Almohad capital of Marrakesh. The Caliph had them banished and asked the Portuguese Infante Don Pedro (who was serving as a mercenary for the Almohads) to send them to Portugal. But the would-be martyrs were not easily dissuaded; they escaped their captors, worked their way back to Marrakesh, and preached in the market place--again insulting Muhammad and his teachings. They were again taken prisoner, and this time the Caliph decreed the death sentence. It is said that Francis greeted the news of their death with joy, proclaiming

"now I can truly say I have five brothers".

Seven Franciscans met their deaths in Ceuta in 1227, after showing similar persistence in the face of Muslim authorities who were at first reluctant to put them to death. The goal of these friars is more their own salvation and glorification as martyrs than the conversion of the infidels to whom they preach. Yet in the minds of these Franciscans, martyrdom and conversion were not in opposition; indeed, they believed that grace and miracles of martyrs could provoke the conversion of their adversaries. In 1228, the year following the Ceuta martyrs, two Franciscans came to preach in Muslim Valencia, provoking the ruler, wali Abû Zayd, to sentence them to death for blasphemy against the prophet. Eight years later, Abû Zayd converted to Christianity: had the blood of the martyrs worked a miracle in softening the heart of the wali and bringing him to see the light of Christianity? It seemed so for Franciscans and for other Christians, though historians see the conversion as the fruit of more mundane political calculation, in the face of the growing power of Aragonese king Jaume I. Over the course of the next two centuries, dozens of Franciscan friars would follow in the footsteps of these martyrs, seeking death in Muslim Granada, the Maghreb, and the Near East.

Meanwhile, Dominicans developed a very different strategy of mission towards Jews and Muslims under the leadership Catalan friar Ramon Penyafort. The Dominicans missionaries learned Hebrew and Arabic, then studied the texts of the Torah, Talmud, Koran, Hadith, and commentaries to these various texts. The goal was not only to understand the key role of these texts in Jewish and Muslim traditions: it was to find weaknesses in them, to be able to prove to the devotees of the two rival religions that they revered fundamentally flawed texts. At the same time, the friars combed these books for passages that could bolster or explain key points of Christian doctrine in ways that would make them comprehensible or acceptable to Jews and Muslims. The idea was that, once conversant in the languages and key texts of Judaism and Islam, Dominican friars would be able to prove to learned Jews and Muslims their religious error and lead them to renounce it. Then they would be able to bring them into the Christian flock.

This presupposes that Jewish and Muslim scholars were prepared to enter into debates with Christians or to listen to their missionary sermons. Yet such willingness was far from given: what reasonable Jew or Muslim would argue religion in the presence of Christian clerics and laymen, knowing that if he failed in the verbal sparring he would bring humiliation to himself and his community, and that if he succeeded in humiliating his Christian rival he might provoke the hostility and violence of the Christian majority? Royal coercion was indispensable to Dominican mission: the king would compel Jews and Muslims to debate with the friars and to listen to their sermons. In 1243, king Jaume presided over the ecclesiastical council of Lerida, which proclaimed that Jews and Muslims were obliged to listen to the sermons of Christian clerics in their synagogues and mosques; the same stipulation was made in the *Fuero de Aragón*.

In 1263, the Dominican strategy was put to a singular test. King Jaume, no doubt at the urging of Ramon Penyafort, ordered Rabbi Moses ben Nachman of Gerona (also known as Nachmanides and as Ramban) to publicly debate with Pablo Cristiá, a Dominican and former Jew. This "Disputation of Barcelona" opened on July 20, 1263, in the royal palace in Barcelona, before a large gathering of royal officials, Catalan lords, prominent townsmen and leading Jews. What was to take place on that July day (and on three subsequent days) was in no respect an even-handed debate to establish which of the two religions was superior. It was a carefully contrived argument restricted to one issue: whether or not the Talmud confirmed the essential truth of Christianity. Friar Pablo Cristiá sought to show, by use of carefully chosen Talmudic passages, that the Messiah had already come, that he was both human and divine, and that he was destined to suffer death for the redemption of his people. To each of these lines of argument, Nachmanides could attempt to parry the Dominicans thrusts, to show the ineptitude of his arguments, but could in no way attack Christianity or question its essential doctrines. The debate was, in other words, designed to test and promote the new Dominican strategy with as little danger as possible towards Christianity: if Friar Pablo carried the day, the Dominicans could claim to have proven the superiority of Christianity and could count on fresh converts to Christianity; if Pablo foundered, it would merely mean that they needed to rework or rethink their missionary methods. In either case, the Dominicans hoped at least to sow the seeds of doubt among their Jewish listeners, to begin to gradually wear down their faith. For Nachmanides, the prospect of debate was bleaker: if he carried the debate, he could at best dissuade the Dominicans from pursuing their new strategy; if he was perceived as having been bettered, it would mean new pressures to convert and an intensified Dominican missionary activity directed at Catalan Jewish communities. Moreover, if he inadvertently said something offensive to Christianity, he could bring down the ire of the king and the Christians on himself and his community. One can understand why the Rabbi was reluctant and only agreed to debate under royal coercion. The event was in fact more of an interrogation than a debate.

Two written accounts of the Barcelona disputation survive: an anonymous Latin text, sporting the royal seal, from the royal chancery of Barcelona, and a Hebrew account by Nachmanides himself. The two accounts differ considerably, of course: the Latin version has a wise Friar Pablo explaining the Talmud to a tongue-tied and chided Rabbi, whereas Nachmanides describes himself easily tossing aside the inane arguments of the ill-educated friar and condescendingly lecturing the king on the irrationality of the doctrines of the virgin birth and the Incarnation. While the two partisan texts give very different ideas of the outcome of the disputation, they concord on the general lines of argument advanced by Pablo and the defence proffered by Nachmanides. Pablo brought forth a series of Talmudic passages and sought to show how each confirmed some aspect of Christian messianic doctrine and disproved Jewish teachings: if he could show via the Talmud that the Messiah had already come and that he was both God and man, he thought, the Jews would have to recognize that Jesus was

the Messiah. Nachmanides at each turned countered by expounding traditional Jewish understanding of the passages in question, affirming that they could not refer to "the Nazarene".

The Dominican missions met stiff resistance from the Jewish and Muslim communities, who often showed considerable skill in obtaining royal protection. We have seen that, from the 1240s, ecclesiastical and royal legislation stipulated that friars could come and preach in synagogues and mosques and that the Jews and Muslims were obliged to politely and quietly listen to these missionary sermons. In the immediate aftermath of the Barcelona disputation, according to Nachmanides, king Jaume accompanied the Dominicans to the Barcelona synagogue: the king himself preached that Christ was the Messiah, and Ramon de Penyafort preached on the Trinity; Nachmanides claims to have rebutted both before the assembled Jews (though to do so, in particular to the king, would hardly have been diplomatic). On August 26, king Jaume issued an edict essentially reiterating the earlier legislation requiring Jews and Muslims to listen to Dominican sermons, adding the stipulation of fines for those who refused to comply. A further edict on August 29 enjoined royal officials to assist friar Pablo and to see that Jews comply with the requirement to listen to his sermons (no mention is made here of Muslims). The following day, August 30, king Jaume made an about-face: he specified that Jews could not be compelled to leave their neighbourhoods in order to listen to the sermons and then added that the Jews should listen to their sermons "if they wish", removing all compulsion and effectively making all earlier legislation a dead letter. Clearly, as Robert Chazan has shown, between August 29 and August 30, a considerable lobbying effort on the part of prominent Catalan Jews succeeded in weakening the king's support for the Dominican mission and in protecting Jewish interest. Yet, in spite of this diplomatic victory, Jews were to be harried in the coming years by the Dominicans convinced that the Barcelona disputation had confirmed that their novel approach to mission could work.

With two such partisan accounts of the Barcelona disputation, it is of course hard to know who got the better of the argument; events in the aftermath of the disputation suggest that each side came away feeling vindicated, yet that neither was completely satisfied with the result. The Dominicans, far from abandoning their strategy of using the Talmud as a source of pro-Christian arguments for mission to Jews, stepped up their efforts, notably their sermons to Jewish communities. Yet they considerably reworked and refined this strategy in the coming years, under the leadership of Ramon Penyafort and particularly through the work of Friar Ramon Martí, whose *Pugio fidei* [*Dagger of the Faith*, 1278] represents the Dominicans' (and indeed medieval Christendom's) greatest monument to the study of post-biblical Judaism and at the same time its most considerable effort at missionizing Jews. The *Pugio* is an immense encyclopaedia for the use of Dominican missionaries, containing hundreds of passages (in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic) from the Torah, Prophets, and Talmud--and on occasion the Koran--all with Latin translations and with detailed explanation of how these texts can be used to

infirm Jewish beliefs and show the superiority of Christianity. Never since the first century of Christianity had Christians studied so intensively the texts and beliefs of Judaism; never had they subjected the Jewish community to such a concerted, intellectually-based attack. The enormous weight and variety of the material amassed in the *Pugio* seems designed to overwhelm the Jewish opponent, to wear down his opposition and to weaken his faith--if not to score decisive victories, at least to sow seeds of doubt. For centuries, Jews had known that Christians disputed their interpretations of Torah, but the Talmud was something uniquely the Jews' own, a source of inspiration and strength. Now Christians were attacking the Talmud itself and pretending it gave testimony to their own doctrines. Nachmanides, in his description of the opening speech he made in the Barcelona disputation, scoffs at the absurdity of this line of argumentation: how can the Christians claim that the sages who wrote the Talmud testified to the truth of Christianity; if they had, they would have gone off and apostatised, like Friar Pablo; instead, it is they who taught us the foundations of our faith.

Nachmanides probably thought he got the better of the debate, but he and other prominent Jews were worried about this novel line of argumentation and about the zeal of the Dominican missionaries. This is no doubt why Nachmanides wrote his account of the Barcelona debate, both to bolster confidence of the Jewish communities by claiming a clear victory and to suggest to them lines of argument that they could effectively deploy to thwart the Dominicans. In this he was successful, as there is evidence that his account was known to Jewish communities in Mallorca, Provence, and France. His report also fell into the hands of the Dominicans, for whom it was a distortion of the proceedings. Friars Pablo Cristiá, Ramon Penyafort and Arnold of Segara complained to an ecclesiastical tribunal; King Jaume proposed to have the book burned and to send Nachmanides into exile for two years. The Dominicans rejected this as insufficient punishment; the king replied that the judgment would remain in his hands. In the event, Nachmanides received no punishment, and his account continued to circulate in the Jewish communities.

Other Jewish scholars wrote to refute the increasingly elaborate and sophisticated arguments of Ramon Martí and his ilk: Barcelonan Solomon Ibn Adret, a student of Nachmanides, composed a refutation of the Dominican arguments in dialogue form, his *Perushei Aggadot [Commentary on the Haggadah]*. Where Nachmanides, debating in front of a predominantly Christian audience, had sought to refute the Christological interpretations of Friar Pablo, Ibn Adret's main concern was to provide positive arguments for Jewish doctrines, and in particular to assure Jews that the Messiah would indeed come, and that the day of his arrival, and of the redemption of the Jews, was drawing near. He criticizes the Christians for proffering tendentious allegorical interpretations of the Torah in order to avoid following its clear injunctions. In another tract, the *Ma'amar al Yishmael [Tract against Ishmael]* Ibn Adret defends Judaism against the attacks of a Muslim polemicist whom he identifies simply as "Ishmael", an "idiot" and a "mad man", but who is most probably none other than the

renowned eleventh-century polemicist Ibn Hazm of Córdoba. Ibn Hazm had argued that Jews had falsified the Torah in antiquity, wilfully corrupting the text in the dark days when many of their kings practised idolatry and the sole copy of the Torah was kept in the temple where corrupt priests could change it at will. Ibn Adret systematically attacks the arguments of this "idiot", arguing that during the lifetime of Moses multiple copies of the Torah were produced and that it would have been impossible for anyone, including idolatrous kings and venal priests, to change a single word of the text without other Jews protesting. He adds that the Christians also accept the Jewish text of the Torah as canonical, even though they err in its interpretations. The shrill and aggressive tone he takes against this "idiot", and the need he feels to refute Ibn Hazm two centuries after his death, suggest that these arguments could raise doubts in the minds of some Jews and that Ibn Adret thought it urgent to combat these doubts.

Ramon Martí and the Dominicans directed their missions to Muslims of the Crown of Aragon as well as to Jews. Though he produced no massive *Pugio* against the Muslims, Martí did write two complementary texts for missionaries to Muslims: the *De seta Machometi* [*On the Sect of Muhammad*, before 1257], an attack on the mores of the "pseudo-prophet" Muhammad and on the heretical doctrines of the Koran; and the *Explanatio symboli apostolorum* [*Explanation of the Apostles' Creed*, 1257], a sort of reasoned catechism, explaining the main doctrines of Christianity to the potential convert from Islam, backing them up with logical arguments and with citations from Bible and Koran. The two texts correspond to two phases of the Dominican missionary strategy: first attack the errors of the rival religion, then instill the doctrines of the true faith.

There is some evidence, from the Muslim side, of formal or informal arguments between Dominican Friars and Muslims. Murcian Muslim Ibn Rashîq recounts how, sometime in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, a number of "Christian monks" (probably Dominican friars) came to Murcia to study Arabic and translate Muslim texts in order to combat Muslim doctrine. He relates a spontaneous debate he had with them over the doctrine of the inimitableness of the Koran (in which, of course, he bested his Christian interlocutors). Two Muslim prisoners in Christian Europe, >Abd Allâh al-Asîr (fl.1267) and Mu.,hammad al-Qaysî (fl.1309), composed works of anti-Christian polemics; al-Qaysî says that during his captivity he had been accosted by an "impudent monk" with whom he debated the faith in the presence of the (unnamed) Christian King. Al-Qaysî's *Kitâb miftâ.,h ad-din* gives his version of that debate. These works represent a new defensive stage in anti-Christian polemics in the Muslim west; they are clearly a reaction to the military success and missionary activity of Christian Europe.

If the Dominicans were the principal motors of this missionary movement, they were not the only Christian disputants. The *Disputatio contra iudeos* [*Disputation against the Jews*] attributed to

Genoese merchant Inghetto Contardo describes a series of debates between Inghetto and prominent Jews of Mallorca in 1286. The text pits Inghetto, a savvy merchant with good theological biblical knowledge, against a series of Jews who are unable to refute his rather traditional, biblical-based arguments for the truth of Christian doctrine: he convinces and converts one Jew after another. The text shows signs of being based on real debate, rather than a simple rehashing of Christian anti-Jewish argument: the disputants discuss the meanings of specific Hebrew words and the Jews voice objections to the Christian cult of images, which for them smacks of idolatry. Inghetto's Jews show a particular resentment towards the missionary work of the Franciscan and Dominican Friars, whom they criticize for each following his own opinion rather than seeking the truth. They proudly trumpet Nachmanides' victory at in the disputation with Friar Pablo as a proof of the inefficacy of Christian (and in particular Dominican) argument; Inghetto responds that he has never heard of the event. This shows that Nachmanides' text was know in Jewish circles and that it had its desired effect--to bolster Jewish confidence and furnish arguments against Christian missionaries. Despite these authentic traces of Jewish voices, Inghetto's is a Christian text, and as usual such "debates" are highly contrived and slanted. The Jews consistently espouse literal interpretations of the biblical passages which Inghetto proffers; Inghetto then expounds to them the deeper, spiritual (and of course Christian) meaning, while the Jews listen eagerly, like alert school children, voicing few objections. The denouement is without surprise: the wisest and most prominent of Inghetto's Jewish opponents see the light and convert to Christianity.

The most ambitious Dominican missionary to Islam ventured not to the subjected Muslims of Valencia or Mallorca, but into the heart of the *Dar al-Islam*, to Baghdad. In 1288, friar Riccoldo da Montecroce left his Dominican convent in Florence, where he had resided for twenty-one years, to travel East in hopes of converting Muslims to Christ. He sailed to Acre, last continental outpost of the embattled Latin kingdom of Jerusalem and made a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre and the other holy sites. He then travelled to Tabriz, in Iran, where he preached through an interpreter, and to Baghdad, where he learned Arabic and pored over the Koran. He writes in glowing admiration of the beauty of Baghdad, of the cleanliness and quiet that reigned in its mosques, of the concentration and devotion with which the Muslims made their daily prayers, of the learning proffered in the madrasas, of the warm welcome he received from Muslim scholars and religious. Yet he also expresses an immense frustration and anguish: his missionary efforts were getting nowhere, it seems, either among Muslims or among the Christians whose denominations were so varied and numerous that he did not know whom to consider an orthodox Christian and whom a heretic. Riccoldo's indignation mounted as he read, in the Koran, that Jesus and the Apostles were Muslims, that the faithful would enjoy the delights of food and sex in heaven: he angrily slammed the Koran on his small private altar, before a statue of

the Virgin and child, and admonished Jesus: "Read! Read what Muhammad says!" But, he sadly concludes, Jesus did not wish to read, did not choose to punish the Muslims for their "blasphemies". His anguish and doubt reached a paroxysm in 1291, when he learned that Acre had fallen to the Mamluks, saw slaves and booty from Acre sold in Baghdad's markets, and had to endure the taunts of Muslims and Jews who asked him, "where is the God of the Christians?" He left Baghdad defeated and discouraged, with little to show for years of missionary activity there.

Upon his return to Italy, in about 1300, Riccoldo undertook a systematic attack on the Koran, composing a polemical tract entitled *Contra legem Sarracenorum* [*Against the Law of the Saracens*]. He reproaches the Koran for being confusing, contradictory, unorganized--in a word, *irrational*. This irrationality, for Riccoldo as for many a Christian celibate, is most strikingly embodied in Koranic injunctions to sexual debauchery: permitting multiple wives and concubines in this world and promising the embraces of dark-eyed *houris* in the next. Just as Ibn Hazm had done two and a half centuries earlier with Jewish and Christian scripture, Riccoldo picks apart the Koran, underlines its contradictions and logical problems, holds it up to the ridicule of his readers. At the same time, he carefully points out passages from the Koran which support Christian doctrine: descriptions of Jesus' virgin birth and miracles, commendations of the Apostles, praises of the Torah and Gospel. The goal is to destroy the textual basis for the rival religion and to point the way towards conversion to Christianity. If the Koran is so "irrational", why do so many Muslim sages, such as those of Baghdad whose learning he lauded, believe in it? They don't, Riccoldo affirms: secretly, in the hearts, they know better, they "despise the Koran"; only out of fear of persecution do they publicly proclaim their faith. Riccoldo's *Contra sectam* was to prove one of the most popular and enduring of medieval Christian works on Islam: it was published in Paris in 1511, then in Basel in 1542; in 1543, Martin Luther published his own German translation of the tract. The stereotype of the irrational, violent and lustful Saracen or Turk, foil for generations of self-righteous European Christians, was to have a long life ahead of it.

Another tack was taken by Catalan polymath Ramon Llull, who devoted much of his life to attempting to convert Jews and Muslims. He was dismissive of the Dominican strategy of attacking the texts and doctrines of rival religions: such attacks, he reasoned, would more often provoke the hostility of Muslim and Jewish interlocutors than their conversion. Llull proposed to argue "not against faith, but through the faith" (*non contra fidem, sed mediante fide*): in other words, he proposed to begin on the base of truths already acknowledged by Jews and Muslims, and by a series of logical and syllogistic arguments bring them to recognize the truth of Christian doctrine.

The result, in particular in Llull's early works, is remarkably respectful and irenic, in comparison with the normal fare of interreligious polemic. The best example is his *Llibre del gentil e*

los tres savis [Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men], composed in Mallorca between 1271 and 1276. This fictional dialogue takes place in a flower-scented clearing in a peaceful wood: a gentile questions a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim to see which of their faiths he should embrace. Each patiently and calmly presents his religion to the gentile, who questions them on key aspects of doctrine and who in the end concludes that he understands which religion is true and thanks the three sages for their help. None of the characters has harsh words for the others; no one insults the founders or the sacred texts of the others. At the end of the dialogue, we do not even learn which of the three religions the gentile has chosen; the three sages do not wish to know, fearing lest it bias their own search for the One Truth. Yet in spite of Lull's respect and apparent even-handedness, Christianity comes out much the better in this debate: Lull's Jew admits that his people are in bitter exile, punished for sins that only God knows (and that Lull's Christian reader will quickly identify as the killing of Jesus); the Muslim confesses that the Koran's teachings on the sexual pleasures of heaven are contrary to reason, and affirms that on account of this the teaching of logic and philosophy have been banned by the Caliph of Baghdad. Lull's supposed Muslim thus affirms (as had Riccoldo da Montecroce) that Islam is fundamentally irrational and that Arab wise men do not actually believe in the teachings of the Koran.

As Lull aged and met with scant success in his missionary activity, his works reflected an increasing bitterness and frustration directed against the Jews and Muslims who remained stubbornly unconvinced by his arguments. He slowly began to grow closer to the Dominican methods he had lambasted in his youth: reasoned attacks on the foundational texts and doctrines of rival religion. Coercion loomed larger in his strategy: he championed--first reluctantly, then passionately--the crusading movement he had once disdained. He proposed that Muslims be captured and imprisoned and then forced to read Christian polemical works (including his own *Llibre del gentil*) in order to make them see the light; once converted, they could be let loose and admonished to return to their homelands as missionaries. As always, Lull sought out the ears of the powerful: the Popes, the kings of Mallorca, Aragon and France. They heard him out yet never gave him the wholehearted support he sought. A discomfited Lull wrote in his *De fine* (1305) "I am neglected, since all rush to acquire pompous or lucrative knowledge. . . . and I live in sadness and in pain, wandering over the world."

In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Dominican missionary movement had lost steam--there was little of the heady enthusiasm of the early days, little confidence that sermon and debate could bring Jews and Muslims into the Christian fold. In the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula, as social and political pressure to convert increased on Muslims and Jews, new Christian converts polemicised against their former coreligionists, "Old Christians" attacked not only Islam and Judaism, but the supposed crypto-Judaism of the *Marranos* and crypto-Islam of the *Moriscos*, and Jews and Muslims continued to write apologetics in order to defend themselves against these charges.

One prominent polemicist was Abner of Burgos (c. 1270- c. 1340), a Jew who converted to

Christianity in 1321 and was subsequently known as Alfonso de Valladolid. He wrote a number of tracts and letters, primarily in Hebrew but also in Castilian, in which he argued, based on biblical and rabbinical texts, that the Messiah promised to the Jews was indeed Jesus and that the tribulations and exile that the Jews had been suffering for the past 1300 years were their punishment for having refused to recognise him. The arguments were not new, and indeed his use of Talmud and Midrash was less learned and sophisticated than that of Ramon Martí, but Alfonso wrote in Hebrew and could draw on a deep familiarity with the texts; his polemics may have been in some ways more disconcerting to contemporary Jews than were the Dominicans'. Rabbi Joseph Shalom wrote letters of rebuttal, pointing out weaknesses and contradictions in Alfonso's arguments and arguing for traditional Jewish interpretations of the texts Alfonso had presented. Abner's *Moreh Zedek* (extant in a medieval Castilian translation, the *Mostrador de justicia*) provoked a response from his former friend Isaac Pollegar, in the form of a lengthy apologetic tract, the *Ezer ha-Dat [Support of the Faith]*. Isaac rebuts Alfonso's arguments and ridicules Christian belief as illogical, contrary to Torah, Talmud, and to the patent truths of philosophy and science. Isaac attempts to reassure his readers by encouraging them to patiently endure their current exile and not lose faith in the coming redemption.

Increasing social pressure and violence provoked fresh conversions of Jews and Muslims to Christianity. A number of public disputations were staged to convince Jews (though rarely if ever Muslims) of their religious error. In 1373 or 1374, Moses of Tordesillas was forced to debate with three *conversos*, including a student of Alfonso de Valladolid; Moses' *Ezer ha-Emunah [Support of Religion]* is his account of the disputation, in which he painstakingly refutes a number of arguments from Alfonso's *Moreh Zedek*. In 1375, in Pamplona, Cardinal Pedro de Luna (the future Avignonese pope Benedict XIII) publicly debated the topic of original sin with Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, whose *Even Bohan [The Touchstone]* gives his account of the debate and seeks to provide his readers with ready-made responses to Christian attacks and questions. In 1413, at the instigation of pope Benedict XIII, of Catalan preacher Vincent Ferrer, and of *converso* Geronimo de Santa Fé, King Fernando I of Aragon ordered the *aljamas* (Jewish communities) of the crown of Aragon to send prominent scholars to Tortosa to dispute with Geronimo and other Christians. The disputation was much more ambitious than earlier ones: it involved 69 sessions, spread out between February 6th, 1413 and November 13th, 1414. The agenda was however similar to that at Barcelona in 1263: Geronimo and his coreligionists presented Christological interpretations of the Talmud and the Jewish disputants tried to refute them. While the Christians were of course free to lambast the Talmud as illogical, ridiculous, and blasphemous, the Jews had to be circumspect in their defence: at one point, when the Pope criticized a Talmudic passage concerning the Messiah as problematic, one rabbi, Astruc, responded "Our Lord Pope. Since you can believe so many unlikely things of your Messiah, let us believe just one of our Messiah!" This ironic response angered the Pope, and the other Jews present were quick to reprimand

Astruc and offer their apologies to the Pope. The dangers of arguing effectively were as great as those of failing to do so. From 1391, the year that saw major outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in most of the Iberian kingdoms' chief cities, to the establishment of the Inquisition in 1480, to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, intolerance of religious difference rose and the Jewish and Converso communities felt increasing harassment and despair.

While the Iberian kingdoms became more and more Christian, many Europeans in North Africa--merchants, mercenaries, slaves, captives or missionaries--converted to Islam. In the 1230s, Franciscans and Dominicans in Tunis lamented that many Christians there were converting to Islam and worried about the problems this conversion posed, in particular to mixed Christian-Muslim families; such conversions continue through the Middle Ages and beyond, into sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the golden age of European and North African piracy. While the vast majority of these converts remained anonymous, one prominent convert, Anselm Turmeda, wrote an account of his conversion and a polemical attack on his former religion. Anselm was born in Mallorca c.1355, entered the Franciscan order by 1376, and studied in Paris and Bologna. At the age of 35 (c. 1390), Anselm tells us in his *Tuhfa al-adîb fî al-rad ala ahl al-salîb* [*Gift of the Learned Man for Refuting the Partisans of the Cross*], he went to Tunis, sought out an interpreter in the court of sultan Abû al->Abbâs Ahmad (1370-1394), and announced his desire to convert to Islam. The Sultan convoked the leaders of the resident Christian community (most of them no doubt from the Italian and Catalan *funduqs*) and announced Turmeda's conversion to them, causing them great consternation at losing such a learned man (if we are to believe Turmeda's own self-aggrandizing account). The Sultan showered the new convert with gifts and married him to the daughter of a local notable. The Sultan's son and successor, Abû Fâris >Abd al->Azîz, named Turmeda head of the customs house, a position which brought him into daily contact with Catalan and Italian merchants.

Turmeda wrote a number of works in Catalan and Arabic. In 1420, he wrote the *Tuhfa* in three parts: an autobiographical essay describing in particular his conversion to Islam; a panegyric of Sultan Abû Fâris; and a polemical tract against Christianity. Turmeda's anti-Christian arguments are traditional, though as a former Franciscan educated in Paris and Bologna, his knowledge of Christian scripture, doctrine, and practice is of course much greater than that of other Muslim authors. The backbone of his argument, like that of Ibn Hazm's three and a half centuries earlier, is a concerted attack on the Gospels, involving three distinct and complementary goals. First, he points out contradictions between the four Gospel accounts, from small inconsistencies concerning the details of Jesus' life, to major differences concerning Jesus' divinity and humanity. The point is to show that the four evangelists cannot agree among themselves, and that their texts are corruptions of what for Turmeda, following Muslim tradition, was the one true Gospel that God revealed to Jesus. Secondly, Turmeda shows how these inconsistencies and contradictions go to the heart of Christian doctrine: in the

Gospels, Jesus frequently says that God has sent him and refers to himself as the "son of Man"; he prays to God, and cries out on the cross "my God! my God! Why have you forsaken me?". All of these passages show, for Turmeda, that Jesus acknowledged that he was merely human and that he never claimed to be God. Thus the Christians' own scriptures can be used to prove the invalidity of their central doctrines, the Incarnation and the Trinity. Thirdly and finally, the Gospels and Torah, corrupted as they are, still contain prophecies concerning the coming of Muhammad: Turmeda strings together a catalogue of passages from Genesis, the Hebrew Prophets and the Gospels that Muslims have traditionally interpreted as referring to Muhammad. Most important is the identification of Muhammad with the Paraclete ("comforter") whose coming Jesus announced in the Gospel of John. It is this identification, Turmeda writes, that led him to see the light of truth and reject Christianity. He recounts how, when he was in Bologna, he and fellow students had an animated discussion about the Paraclete, none of them able to understand to whom it referred. He later privately asked his sage and wizened professor what he thought; the professor tells him *sotto voce* that he will explain, if Anselm does not reveal it to anyone: the Paraclete is Muhammad; yet he dare not teach this publicly for fear of persecution. Alas, adds the professor, I am now too old to travel to a Muslim country and publicly embrace Islam, but if I were young like you, that is what I would do. Anselm, in joy, prepares his belongings and heads for Tunis. The story is highly improbable, but it must have been satisfying for Muslim audiences, who could believe that the wisest among Christians knew the truth of Islam and continued practising Christianity merely out of fear of bodily punishment. The charge is remarkably similar to that of Christian authors such as Riccoldo da Monte Croce and Ramon Llull, that Arab sages secretly reject Islam and that only fear causes them to feign adherence to it.

Turmeda also attacks Christian rites and practices. He particularly lambasts the use of confession and indulgences. Christians confess their sins to priests, to whom they then pay hefty sums of money for "bulls of indulgence, which are a sort of certificate of dispensation from the fires of hell" [p.363]; they have themselves buried with these certificates and stupidly think themselves immune from punishment. The priests grow rich by encouraging them to buy indulgences rather than to lead a pure life. The priests also keep their flocks in the dark by foisting bogus miracles on them: in particular, by blessing the holy water in baptismal fonts and claiming that their blessing keeps the water pure and clean. In fact, Anselm charges, at night, secretly, the priests add salt and oil to the baptismal water, which preserves it from corruption; the ignorant Christian masses thinks the water is kept pure by the priests' blessings and hence revere them as holy men. Turmeda's Muslim reader is flattered: he feels more intelligent than the obtuse Christian dupe to such cheap tricks and more righteous than the spiteful and avaricious priests who manipulate their flocks and hide the truth from them.

On the Christian side, the fifteenth century saw a hardening of anti-Muslim sentiment in

response to Ottoman expansion, to the Portuguese expeditions in Africa, the increasing impatience of some elements in the Aragonese and Castilian nobility to conquer the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, growing intolerance and mistrust of *mudejares* (subject Muslims) in the Christian kingdoms. Pedro de Cavalleria, from a family of Aragonese *Conversos*, penned c.1450 a *Tractatus zelus Christi contra iudaeos, sarracenos et infideles* [*Treatise on Christ's hatred against Jews, Saracens and Infidels*]. Alonso de Espina's *Fortalitium Fidei* [*Fortress of the Faith*, 1459] sought to protect Christendom from the assaults of the infidels, through polemical argumentation and also through proposing careful restrictions of contacts between Christians and non-Christians and suggesting that the best long-term solution was the conquest of Granada and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims.

There were indeed those who, like the Dominicans of the thirteenth century, still thought that logical argumentation and organized disputation were the best ways to bring Muslims into the Christian fold. The most vocal proponent of such a strategy was Juan de Segovia who, in 1431, attempted without success to convince prince Yûsuf of Granada, in exile in the Castilian court, to debate with him or to have one of his learned Muslim companions do so; Yûsuf refused, affirming that no Muslim would dare argue religion in a Christian land. Juan relates an exchange he had several years later, in Medina del Campo, with the Granadan ambassador, who had criticized Christians for "eating their God" and for facile absolution of sins. Towards the end of his life, Juan, with the collaboration of Segovian Muslim >Îsâ ibn Jâbir, produced a tri-lingual Koran, with the Arabic text alongside new Castilian and Latin translations. The purpose of this enterprise was no doubt to provide a more sophisticate tool with which to subject the Koran to the same relentless criticism that the Dominicans had earlier subjected it to (or that Muslims like Anselm Turmeda had inflicted on the Gospels).

As Juan and >Îsâ were producing their Koran, Juan lobbied (in letters to Cardinals Nicholas of Cusa and Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini--later Pope Pius II [1458-64]) for the organisation of what he called a "contraferentia", a sort of major disputation between prominent Christians and Muslims. In the wake of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II's capture of Constantinople in 1453, no "contraferentia" was held. Pope Pius II wrote a letter to the Sultan, inviting him to convert to Christianity. Nicholas of Cusa subjected the Koran to a humanistic dissection in his *Cribatio alkorani* [*Sieving of the Koran*], attempting to highlight the contradictions in the Muslims' holy text and to show that it was a hopeless hodgepodge of elements from Judaism and Nestorian Christianity. Nicholas' methods are new, but his goals are essentially the same as earlier polemicists.

The polemical and apologetic texts of the thirteenth to fifteenth century Mediterranean show both continuity and significant change from previous centuries. Continuity, because members of the three Abrahamic religions feel the same need as their forbears to defend their own religion and to attack rival religions as illegitimate or imperfect versions of the true faith. Hence the Christian Arabic

polemic against Islam, the *Risâlat al-Kindî* [*Letter of al-Kindî*], composed in ninth or tenth century Baghdad, was translated to Latin in Toledo in the twelfth century, used by countless Christian polemicists, and published in Basel in 1542. The arguments of eleventh-century Muslim Ibn Hazm are taken up by later Muslim polemicists and attacked by Jews and Christians. Yet significant change takes place over this period. The heady and naive optimism of the Mendicant missionaries of the thirteenth centuries is dashed; Jews and Muslims are impervious to the friars' supposedly rational arguments. The very existence of Jewish and Muslim communities in Christian Europe is increasingly seen as corruptive and undesirable.

Suggested reading

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