

The Marranos

A History in Need of Healing

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Introduction

This booklet on the Marranos, the Jews of Spain, Portugal and Latin America baptized under duress, is the third in the series of the TJCII (Toward Jerusalem Council II) booklets. TJCII was launched in 1996¹. In March 1998 the committee members and a group of intercessors made a prayer journey to Spain, visiting Granada, Cordoba and Toledo. From this time the TJCII leadership knew that one day we would have to address the history and sufferings of the Marranos.

An explanatory note is needed about the terminology. In the abundant literature on this subject, various terms are used: Marranos, the Spanish term *conversos* (converts), New Christians (in contrast to the Gentile Old Christians), crypto-Jews, and *anusim*, the Hebrew term for forced converts. While *conversos* continued as a description for all the baptized of Jewish ancestry long after the first generation submitted to baptism, the term “crypto-Jews” is only used for those who continued to affirm their Jewish identity and to practice their Jewish faith as best they could in secret. This booklet follows this usage. As it is the total phenomenon of the Jews baptized under pressure that concerns TJCII (see Part IV), the term “Marrano” has been retained as an overarching description. Although this label has long had pejorative overtones, its use can remind us of the suffering and ignominy to which these people were subjected².

¹ For information on TJCII, see Peter Hocken, *Toward Jerusalem Council Two: The Vision and Story* (2nd edn. 2004).

² It is often said that Marrano comes from the Castilian for “pig”. However, for Henry Kamen this is “etymologically undocumented” (*The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision*, p. 323). Carlos Carrete Parrondo gives the source as the old verb *marrar*, meaning “to lack”, indicating their lack of Christian faith (Henri Méchoulan (ed), *Les Juifs de l’Espagne: histoire d’une diaspora 1492 – 1992*, p. 23). Kamen cites Carrete Parrondo as rooting the term in a “marring” (spoiling) of the Christian faith (pp. 323 – 24).

In 2005, the TJCII executive decided that the time was ripe to address this issue. In September 2005, the first Latin American TJCII Consultation was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the participation of Messianic Jews from Argentina and Brazil. The Marrano issue would be tackled “head on” in Buenos Aires. Accordingly, Marcelo Miranda Guimarães, the founder and leader of Ensinãdo de Sião Messianic ministry in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, was invited to speak on the Marrano history and heritage, particularly in Latin America. I responded with a Catholic confession of the sin in this sad history of the forced conversion of many Jews and the systematic attempt to eliminate all continuing Jewish practice. It was a very moving moment when about twenty people of Marrano ancestry responded to an invitation to come forward for prayer.

Liliana Saez, a member of Bet-el Messianic Jewish congregation in Buenos Aires, later wrote about her experience during the TJCII visit. “... we went to pray at Plaza 1 de Mayo with Catholic and Jewish leaders There I experienced a deep pain as I felt in my own soul the horror, the loneliness, the contempt, and the emptiness of knowing that we had been excluded from the Jewish culture and also from the Gentile. Then our identity was lost, and we were nearly nothing. ... When Father Peter spoke about forced baptisms, the imposition of Catholic laws, the persecution from Inquisition spies, the forbidding of Jewish practices, the fear of accusation as heretics, the condemnation of living their lives as captives, everything was too painful. After the Inquisition the mothers told their sons to keep silent, and they lived with the fear of death if they revealed their identity. It was like I was living all those experiences. I felt like I was being cut in pieces, as if the Body of the Messiah itself would be divided and dispersed. There is great pain for the thousands of Jewish souls that still today do not understand who they are. I feel like the adoptive daughter who has just now discovered

her true origins, the true parents and older brothers who earlier did not love me, but have now come to ask forgiveness.”³

In TJCI we are aware that this long history of oppression and suffering has to be more fully addressed, but that it cannot be quickly handled and then dismissed. The deep wounds inflicted require time and the grace of the Lord to be healed. Detailed study and prolonged prayer are both required. This booklet is offered as a contribution to make the history and the issues more widely known, and to stimulate a faith-filled response within the whole body of Christ. We believe that the eventual healing of this massive wound will unleash unimaginable blessings for the Church and for the Jewish people.

³ *TJCI Communiqué* (Spring 2006), p. 3.

Part I

The Spanish Background

The history of the Marranos began in Spain in 1391, and just over a century later in Portugal. From Spain and Portugal, the Marrano story spread to all parts of Latin America under Iberian domination – and to a lesser degree to other European lands under Catholic rule.

The first question to ask is: Why Spain? The negative attitudes of the medieval Christian world toward the Jews were not confined to Spain. Even before the Marrano issue arose in Spain, there had been many outbursts of anti-Semitic violence in other European nations, and instances of the Jews being expelled from cities and from entire kingdoms, particularly in Western Europe.

However, there were several elements in the history of Spain that were significantly different from the rest of Europe, and which in retrospect can be seen to have contributed to the later history of the Marranos.

First, it was in Spain under the Visigothic kings of the seventh century that the slow erosion of Jewish rights and a drastic weakening in the protection of the Jewish community under Roman law led to a concerted attempt to eliminate Judaism from an entire land. The Visigoths, a Germanic tribe, had conquered much of Spain from the year 412. They were Arian Christians, regarded as heretics by the Catholic Church, but they were somewhat more friendly to the Jews. Things turned bad for the Jews of Spain when King Reccared converted to the orthodox Catholic faith at the end of the sixth century.

Throughout the seventh century, a number of weak and short-lived kings, together with a clergy more hostile than the general populace, sought to weaken and then to eliminate the Jewish community, who were perceived as a threat to Catholic orthodoxy. During this period, kings sought to impose their anti-Jewish policies through a series of church Councils, though there were intermittent reigns when this repression of the Jews was abandoned. The frequency with which anti-Jewish measures were passed by a series of Councils in Toledo itself indicates the relative ineffectiveness of such policies. While the available data inform us about the conciliar decrees, very little is known about the actual life of the Jewish community under this pressure.

It was in 613 that the Jews of Spain were forced to choose between baptism and exile. Some went to France and others were baptized. Twenty years later, the fourth Council of Toledo rejected forced baptisms in theory, but upheld their validity after the fact¹. Sanctions were to be applied to baptized Jews not practicing the Catholic faith, including the removal of their children so that they would not grow up in “the error of their parents”. After another respite, the decisions of 633 were reapplied with greater severity, and in 653, a Council proposed the death penalty for convert Jews continuing any Jewish observance, a punishment abolished a generation later. Another king forbade all commerce and trade to anyone who was not a “true Christian”. Under such severe oppression, the allegation of 694 that Spanish Jews had invited the Moors to invade Spain and overthrow the Catholic kings has a strong plausibility. In consequence, all the Jews of Spain were reduced to the status of slaves.

¹ This position was that of Pope Gregory the Great (590 - 604), who had expressed strong disapproval of forced conversions.

In no other European land during the first Christian millennium had there been such a persistent attempt to eliminate the Jewish people by enforced exile or enforced baptism. Parkes summarizes this sad history by the comment: “Such was the end of the first Spanish Jewish community, a foreshadowing of the greater tragedy which was to befall their successors nearly eight hundred years later.”²

Secondly, the history of Spain differed significantly from the rest of Western Europe as a result of the Muslim conquest in the year 711. For the Jewish community, Muslim rule was a welcome relief from Christian oppression. Stories circulated that the Jews had opened the gates of Toledo to the Muslim invaders, and in the fifteenth century the “Old Christians” used this “memory” against the Jewish community and against the “New Christians”.

The Muslim conquest inaugurated a period of close collaboration between the Jewish population and the Muslim conquerors. A Jewish historian has written of this time: “Thus, from the first moment, the foundation was laid for that Jewish-Arab cooperation and unequalled cultural symbiosis which developed in a later period.”³ The tenth and eleventh centuries were a time of great Jewish scholarship in philosophy and in the sciences, particularly in Andalusia in southern Spain. The Jewish scholars all wrote in the Arabic language. The flourishing of Jewish life and culture under Muslim rule probably contributed to later Christian oppression, for Jewish prosperity contradicted the prevailing theology. Since Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century, it was taught that as punishment for the Jewish rejection of Jesus, God was preserving the Jewish people in a state of humiliation so as to demonstrate the consequences of their iniq-

² James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, p. 368.

³ Moses A. Shulvass, *The History of the Jewish People*, Vol. II, p. 11.

uity and unbelief. The later oppression of the Jews would once again bring the facts into line with this theology.

Thirdly, the Jewish population in Spain was much larger than in most other parts of Europe. The Jewish population was highest in Andalusia, with the Jews forming over half the population in Granada in 1066. It is probably impossible to know the approximate Jewish population in Spain at the start of the 15th century. Estimates have ranged from 200,000 to 900,000, though the actual figure must have been nearer the lower estimate⁴. The Jews may have formed up to ten per cent of the Spanish population. To help place these figures in perspective, there were probably about 5,000 Jews in England in the year 1290, when England was the first kingdom to expel its Jewish inhabitants. The scale of the Marrano issue in Spain was a consequence of the size of the Jewish population.

⁴ The higher figure was extrapolated from the figure of 600,000 Jews, alleged to have been living in Spain at the time of the expulsion in 1492. But this figure was almost certainly taken from the biblical account of the exodus from Egypt, with which comparisons were made (see Num. 2: 32).

Part II

The Marranos and the Inquisition

The story of the Marranos begins in the year 1391. For Jewish historian Élie Barnavi, “the year 1391 probably constitutes one of the major dates in Jewish history, if not in the memory of the Jewish people.”¹ In the summer of 1391 the first wave of mass baptisms of Spanish Jews occurred after violent mobs threatened death if they did not “convert”. Riots broke out in Seville, where the Archdeacon of Ecija, Ferrant Martinez, had been preaching inflammatory anti-Jewish sermons since 1378. The death of the king in 1390 gave Martinez the chance the following summer to stir up the mobs to attack the Jewish quarter in Seville. The Jewish quarter was ransacked. Some 4,000 Jews were beaten to death in Seville, many were sold into Arab slavery and some submitted to baptism. Within two weeks, the Jewish communities in the rest of Andalusia were attacked. The riots spread to Cordoba, where about 2,000 Jews were killed, and then to Toledo. In all about 70 Jewish communities in Castile were devastated. The riots then spread to Aragon and to Majorca, but not to Navarre or to Portugal. Tens of thousands of Jews are said to have received baptism at this time.

A second wave of Jewish baptisms occurred between 1412 and 1415. The causes this time were not threats from rampaging mobs, but the targeting of the Jews by one of the great Catholic revivalist preachers of the age, Vincent Ferrer, later canonized. Ferrer used his influence to ensure the passage of anti-Jewish laws, aimed at encouraging conversions to Christianity. Ferrer warned against the use of violence toward the Jews and urged that the Jews be con-

¹ Élie Barnavi, *Histoire universelle des juifs*, p. 114

verted through persuasion. But the enthusiastic crowds that followed him through Castile and Catalonia were not so disciplined, and an atmosphere of pressure and coercion pervaded this campaign. At this time, some synagogues were forcibly converted into churches. It should be noted that the conversos received little or no catechesis before or after their baptism.

Baptism and entry into the Catholic Church automatically transformed the status of the “converted” Jews. While the restrictions on Jewish participation in public life were not as severe in the Iberian Peninsula as in much of Europe at this time, the Jews were still excluded from any position involving authority over the baptized. With baptism, professions and occupations which had previously been closed opened up to the *conversos*. In fact, many *conversos* came from the social and intellectual elite in the Jewish community. They often came to occupy important positions in the government, in the army, in the universities and in the Church. Many intermarried with the nobility, and some even married into the royal house of Aragon. One source says that by mid-century one half of the dignitaries at the court of Aragon were “New Christians”. Their increasing power and affluence began to arouse jealousy and concern so that by the middle of the 15th century, the “New Christians” were more unpopular with the general Spanish population than the Jews who had remained faithful to the synagogue.

Reaction against the “New Christians”

A second stage in the Marrano history begins in 1449, with the outbreak of riots specifically directed against the “New Christians”, first in Ciudad Real and then in Toledo, the capital of Castile. The rioters in Toledo turned on the rich converso merchants, and acquired control of the city. This led to the first “purity of blood” law

(limpieza de sangre), excluding all “New Christians” from public office in the city (ordinary Jews were already excluded). The Toledo law manifested a contempt for the Jewish people in describing the “New Christians” as “disgraceful, unfit, inept, and unworthy of holding any office and public and private benefit in said city or public notaries or as witnesses ... to have domain over Old Christians in the holy Catholic faith.” Pope Nicholas V immediately denounced this law, and excommunicated its authors. However, the obsession over purity of blood was not to be easily eradicated.

The continued outbreak of riots against the “New Christians” led to the intervention of civil authority to prevent such disturbances. The rulers were terrified of riots as a symptom of popular unrest. When Ferdinand and Isabella acquired power over both Aragon and Castile, they were determined to eliminate all rabble-rousing, including inflammatory preaching, and to punish all riotous behavior. Influential figures hostile to the Jews tried to persuade the monarchs that the unrest was due to secret Jewish practice by the conversos, encouraged by the rabbis and the synagogue. In fact, anti-Semitism and jealousy seem to have been the major causes of the social unrest. From their reactions came first the Spanish Inquisition and then the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The Inquisition would deal with the problem of ongoing secret Jewish practice among the “New Christians”, and any ongoing Jewish influence would be removed by the expulsion of the Jews.

There are differing views among scholars as to the extent of ongoing Jewish observance among the *conversos* of 15th century Spain before the Decree of Expulsion in 1492. The more convincing view advanced in Gitlitz’s monumental study, *Secrecy and Deceit*, points to widespread Jewish practice among the *conversos*. “From the earliest wave of forced conversions in 1391 until the expulsion in

1492 Iberian *conversos* continued to live in close proximity to their Jewish neighbors despite sporadic attempts to formally segregate the city neighborhoods according to religion.”² While this does not demonstrate the level of ongoing Jewish practice among the *conversos*, it points to a considerable degree of influence. Some scholars argue that such practice was not that common, at least until the Inquisition began to function in the early 1480s, but their arguments are not wholly convincing. The judgment of the rabbis of North Africa that the *conversos* of 15th-century Spain were apostates, not the unwilling victims of persecution, was based on the choice to remain in Spain rather than immigrate to a place where Jewish practice was permitted. It is not a reliable indicator as to the Jewish practice of those who chose not to emigrate. The consistent assertions by Isaac Abravanel, a leading Jewish adviser to King Ferdinand, that the accusations against the *conversos* were false, refer to the period when the Inquisition was prosecuting many of their number.

The Establishment of the Spanish Inquisition

When King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella sought to eradicate crypto-Jewish practice from their realms, they wanted a new form of Inquisition over which they would have direct control. For them, the earlier medieval pattern of an Inquisition under the control of the local bishop, such as the Bishop of Valencia had reactivated in the 1460s against the judaizers, was quite inadequate. But neither did they want the papal form of Inquisition, under the direct power of the Pope, used against the Albigensians in southern France in the 13th century. So the monarchs petitioned the Pope for the establishment of an Inquisition under their direction, primarily to deal with

² Gitlitz, p. 587.

the “judaizing heresy” widespread in Andalusia. “Judaizing” was the term used to describe any continuation of Jewish practice by the “New Christians”. Papal approval was reluctantly given by Sixtus IV in 1478. Unlike the Roman Inquisition, all the officials, except for the Inquisitor General, were appointed by the King, not by the Pope.

Because the ultimate authority remained in the hands of the Pope, the “New Christians” invested much energy and money in seeking a mitigation of their sufferings from the Popes. However the efforts of some Popes to limit some of the worst features of the Spanish Inquisition were largely unsuccessful, often being ignored by the kings. While the Spanish Inquisition was officially part of the Church, as matters of faith were the exclusive preserve of the Church, the Spanish bishops had no authority over the Inquisition, and it quickly became the most feared institution in Spain. By the mid-16th century, the Spanish Inquisition had become a law unto itself, increasingly independent of the crown and in practice answerable to none but itself.

There is widespread agreement that the establishment of the Inquisition contributed to the spread of judaizing among the conversos. Why was this? First, the founding of the Inquisition represented the first direct attack on judaizing “New Christians” and as such placed all “New Christians” under some degree of suspicion. Its existence put a spotlight on the converso community. When the Inquisition first arrived in a city, an “Edict of Grace” was proclaimed, inviting those guilty of judaizing and other offenses against the faith to confess within thirty days with a promise of lenient treatment, while all Catholics were severely admonished to provide information about any known suspects. This attack on Jewish practice probably stirred the consciences of some less than convinced “New Christians”.

Secondly, the “Edicts of Grace” provided a long list of judaizing practices to help paid informers, neighbors and snoopers to identify offenders. Ironically, in the generations after the expulsion, when the crypto-Jews lacked materials for instruction in Judaism, these lists became guides for Marrano practice.

Although the Inquisition was officially concerned with all offenses against the Catholic faith, and later was concerned with those with Protestant sympathies, the focus in the initial period up to 1530 was on the *conversos*. As a church institution, the Inquisition had direct authority only over the baptized. Its major task was to root out every form of ongoing attachment to Judaism among those who were now officially Catholic. The procedures and methods of the Spanish Inquisition are described below.

The Effect of the Expulsion of 1492

There is little agreement among scholars as to the numbers involved in the expulsion: for the total number of Jews in Spain before the expulsion, the number who were baptized and stayed in Spain, the number who fled to Portugal, and the number that sought refuge in North Africa. For the total number of Jews in Spain at that time, figures range from 70,000 to 200,000. The Decree of Expulsion was in effect a command: “Convert or Leave”. The number of Jews who chose baptism rather than exile is estimated between 25,000 and 50,000. The lower figure seems more probable. It was somewhat boosted by those, probably between 1,500 and 6,000, who left Spain, but soon decided to return and be baptized, so reclaiming their family properties.

The expulsion changed the character of crypto-Judaism in Spain. Previously, the judaizers could obtain information about Judaism and

consult Jewish literature among relatives in the Jewish community. After the expulsion, these resources were removed. Jewish books became incriminating evidence for the Inquisition, as did any object of Jewish piety. As a result, the only remaining place for Jewish practice in relative safety was the home. This gave a new importance to the role of women, particularly the mothers of families, in the practice and spread of crypto-Judaism (see further in Part III).

The expulsion also gave crypto-Judaism a major boost. To the minority of convinced judaizers among the mostly third generation “New Christians”, whose family “conversion” dated back at least eighty years, were added many who had long resisted efforts to christianize them until they were faced with the dilemma “Lose everything or convert”.

The most intense investigation and prosecution of judaizing “New Christians” in Spain took place before the year 1540. By the middle of the 16th century, the generation with memories of pre-expulsion days and an overt Jewish presence in Spain had largely died out. While most knew who were fellow “New Christians”, it became increasingly difficult to know who continued Jewish practice, and very dangerous to make enquiries. The lack of access to Jewish sources led to an attenuation of Jewish practice among the active “crypto-Jews”. After the first third of the 16th century, the trials of judaizers decreased sharply. Those committed to Judaism had either been arrested or had left the country, whether for the safety of a Protestant or Muslim land or for the uncertainty of the Spanish colonies. Gitlitz says that “Both rabbinical and Inquisition evidence suggests that by 1540 most remaining *conversos* had been absorbed into the culture of Spanish Catholicism.”³

³ Gitlitz, p. 41.

The Spread to Portugal

When King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled the remaining Jews from Spain in the summer of 1492, a large number – estimates range between 50,000 and 120,000 – crossed the border into Portugal, the majority heading for northern Portugal. Portugal was a relatively attractive option for the Spanish Jews both because of the similarity of culture and language, and because Portugal had no history of forced conversions. However, Portugal was to prove a short-lived refuge. In the first years, King John II removed seven hundred Jewish children from their families and sent them to be raised as Christians on the island of Sao Tomé off the West African coast. But things got worse under his successor, King Manuel I. The new king wanted to marry Princess Isabella of Spain, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who would only allow the marriage on condition that the king expel all the Jews from Portugal.

In December 1496, a decree of expulsion was issued. At this time, the Jews constituted about 8% of the population of the kingdom. Seeing how disastrous the loss of the Jews would be for the nation's economy, the king decided they must stay, which meant baptism by force rather than under pressure. There was no choice. As a Jewish historian writes: "In Portugal ... the entire Jewish community, both native and immigrant, was dragged to the baptismal font in 1497 and declared to be Christians. The Portuguese Marranos were thus converted as a community."⁴ As a result the Portuguese Marranos were far stronger in their Jewish adherence, many having already held out in Spain against massive pressures. These mass baptisms of Jews in Portugal produced a situation more clear-cut than in Spain. Virtually none of the Jews baptized in Portugal believed in Jesus Christ, whereas in Spain the situation was more confused.

⁴ Shulvass, Vol. III, p. 166.

Under King Manuel, many Jews entered the service of the king, and so the Portuguese Marranos played a large role in the developing commerce with the new colonies being established in the Indies and in Latin America. There followed a period – some popular disturbances apart⁵ – when they were able to develop a relatively stable form of “double life” as outwardly practicing Catholics and as secret Jews. The stronger commitment to Judaism and this period of “acclimatization” were the major reasons why Marrano life in Portugal was harder to eliminate than in Spain.

With the advent of King John III, a more repressive policy was pursued. After some five years of debate and controversy between Popes and monarchs, an Inquisition was established in 1536 on the Spanish model, though its structures were not identical⁶. The smaller size of Portugal facilitated a stronger organization of the Inquisition, which from 1560 was centered in Lisbon, Coimbra and Evora⁷, and which recruited a vast army of officials. In Portugal, the “judaizers” formed a much higher percentage of Inquisition prosecutions than in Spain. The severity of the repression in Portugal led to many Marranos setting sail for Antwerp and later for Amsterdam. After Portugal came under Spanish rule in 1580, many returned to Spain, encouraged by reports that the repression had eased off. This influx of Marranos from Portugal re-energized the Spanish Inquisition, so that in a second wave of Inquisition focus on the judaizers, a high percentage of those indicted were from Portugal.

Because the crypto-Jews of Portugal put up a stronger opposition than the crypto-Jews of Spain, the Portuguese Inquisition never fully

⁵ At least two thousand *conversos* were killed in two days of riots in Lisbon in 1506, though those responsible for the massacre were severely punished. In 1528 the Marranos were attacked in several towns, with massacres in the Azores and on the island of Madeira.

⁶ Torture was not authorized by the Church authorities until 1542.

⁷ A fourth tribunal of the Portuguese Inquisition was established in Goa, where over 100 “judaizers” were burned at the stake.

succeeded in eliminating crypto-Jewish observance. When Portugal regained its independence in 1640, there was increased opposition to the Inquisition, because of the negative effects of its confiscation policies on the nation's economy. Nonetheless, the Inquisition was active against judaizers until the middle of the 18th century, and it remained a stronger institution for longer in Portugal than in Spain, surviving a period of suppression by the Pope between 1674 and 1681. In 1773, the official distinction between "New Christian" and "Old Christian" was abolished. But the secrecy was so deeply instilled that it was only in the twentieth century that the outside world heard that some villages in northern Portugal were largely inhabited by crypto-Jews, still practicing their mixture of public Catholicism and secret Judaism.

The Marranos of Latin America

The Hispanic conquest of Central and South America began in the same period as the oppression of the Marranos. Christopher Columbus sailed from Spain for the New World in the summer of 1492, the month after the last Jews had departed the kingdom. The New World held a big attraction for the Marranos, as a region of new commercial opportunities further from the clutches of the Inquisition. At least four companions of Columbus were of Jewish descent. It is estimated that over one-half of the Spanish colonists in "New Spain" (Mexico) were probably Marranos. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were 500 Marranos in Argentina, mostly in Buenos Aires. They were also in Peru, Venezuela and Colombia from an early date. Many were merchants, with business that necessitated travel. Their mobility was both a form of protection and a means of communication.

However, the Spanish Crown pursued the judaizers to Latin America, where seats of the Spanish Inquisition were established: in Lima (Peru) in 1569 – 70, in Mexico City in 1570 and a third in Cartagena (Colombia) in 1610. Of the judaizers arrested in Latin America, some had been born in Spain or Portugal, others had come via the Netherlands where they had resumed their profession of Judaism. Of the three regions, Mexico had many more crypto-Jews than Peru or Colombia. There were two major periods of Inquisition activity against the crypto-Jews of Mexico. Between the late 1570s and 1601, a first wave largely eliminated the active judaizers of Spanish origin; then in the 1640s a second wave of crypto-Jewish immigrants, mostly from Portugal, was subjected to severe persecution.

The Portuguese “discovery” of Brazil in April 1500 represented an opening of the “Red Sea” for thousands of converso families in Portugal, once “New Christians” were permitted to help in the colonization of Brazil. The greater freedom of Brazil facilitated a return to fuller Jewish practice. Unlike the Spanish colonies, the activities of the Inquisition in Brazil were always controlled from Europe. Officials from Lisbon recruited local agents and “spies”. Those arrested in Brazil on charges of heresy were sent for trial in Lisbon. In the whole history of the Lisbon Inquisition, less than a thousand cases were submitted from Brazil.

From 1630 until 1654 the northeast of Brazil was under the rule of Holland, and the Jews were given freedom to practice Judaism. Many European Jews migrated to Dutch Brazil, and many of the crypto-Jews there began to practice Judaism openly. The first synagogue of the Americas was built in Recife. It is estimated that about one half of the population there was Jewish. When Portugal re-conquered northeast Brazil in 1654, anyone identified as a Jew had to leave Brazil. Many went to the Caribbean, some to Holland,

and some to North America, where they helped to establish the city of New Amsterdam, now known as New York. The poorest Jews immigrated to other regions of Brazil, especially the state of Minas Gerais, to explore the gold mines and later to raise cattle and to produce coffee. The “New Christians” of Brazil received their freedom in 1773, when Portugal abolished all legal distinctions between Old and New Christians, but the Inquisition in Brazil only officially ended after independence from Portugal in 1822.

How the Inquisition Worked

The Spanish Inquisition drew up very detailed procedures, which its officials zealously followed. A notary was required for all forms of interrogation, including those accompanied by torture. The notary recorded every utterance of the accused, even noting their screams and incoherent cries. Thus, in the places where the Inquisition archives were not destroyed at the time of its demise, there are extraordinarily detailed records of accusations and interrogations, throwing much light on the social and family life of the crypto-Jews.

First, the officials of the Inquisition gathered accusations. They then sought to confirm the information provided. The officials were generally meticulous, only proceeding to the stage of arresting the accused when they were fairly certain of their case⁸. Thus it was common for the accused not to be arrested for many months or even years after the first denunciation. The arrested were placed in the dungeons of the Inquisition, constructed to allow for secret spying on the behavior of the imprisoned. Unlike the regular prisons of that period, the prisons of the Inquisition were closely guarded, and the prisoners were isolated from the outside world, a deliberate tactic to increase the pressure to provide what the inquisitors sought.

⁸ “It seldom made an arrest unless it was fairly certain of its case.” (Cecil Roth, *The Spanish Inquisition*, p. 125).

The inquisitors sought two responses from the accused: first, a confession of guilt, an expression of repentance and a request for pardon; second, the provision of names of accomplices and other persons involved in similar practices. The inquisitors' zeal to eradicate crypto-Judaism often caused interrogations to continue long after a confession of guilt was obtained. It was for these two purposes that torture could be used. Torture was more frequently applied to the judaizers (and to suspected Protestants) than to other accused, though its use was more frequent at some periods than others⁹.

A distinction was made between slight offenses and grave. Those who confessed to grave offenses, *de vehementi* in official terminology, had to wear a garment, the *sanbenito*, a long yellow robe regarded with horror by the general population, for a specified number of years. However, reconciliation from grave offenses was only permitted once, and a second conviction admitted of no absolution, and led automatically to the stake. A confession of guilt would then lead to execution by strangling, with the corpse being burned, whereas only the impenitent were burned alive.

The sentences were read out at a celebration called in Spanish an *auto de fe*, in Portuguese *auto da fe*, both terms meaning an "act of faith". In the early years of the Inquisition, an *auto de fe* was mostly held in church and was relatively simple. By the 17th century, it had become a vast and elaborate public spectacle, full of pageantry, that often lasted all day and even into the night.

Among the worst features of the Inquisition were its encouragement of anonymous informants, whose identity was not revealed to

⁹ Kamen gives some quite low figures for the percentage of accused undergoing torture in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, but states "In the late seventeenth century at least three-quarters of all those accused in Spain of judaizing – several hundreds of people – were tortured." (p. 189).

the accused, and the confiscation of the property of those found guilty. These elements led to many false accusations. Anonymous denunciation encouraged accusations based on enmity and revenge. The confiscation of property gave added incentives to the inquisitors to foster accusations against the more wealthy. Even “New Christians” who had acquired prominent positions in state and Church were not immune from denunciation and arrest. One of the few ways in which the accused could have the charges against them dismissed was to succeed in identifying an accuser as a long-standing enemy.

Financially, the Spanish Inquisition depended largely on the confiscation of the property of those found guilty of serious offenses. The property of the accused was “sequestered” for the time of imprisonment and trial, with the expenses being deducted. Only in 1561 was the use of sequestered property permitted to support the dependents of the accused. It is not known how much of the income thus generated went to the Crown, but indications are that most remained in the hands of the inquisitors. Their expenses were considerable, including the payment of officials and “familiaris”, the lay servants to the inquisitors, as well as in some cities the construction of new palaces.

The Number of Victims

It is now recognized that the statistics in past literature on the crypto-Jews accused and convicted by the Inquisition were unduly high. Establishing precise figures is difficult, because records are only available for particular tribunals over specific periods. One of the most thorough attempts to calculate the overall figures for Spain, Portugal and the Latin American colonies gives the percentage of cases of judaizing as some 10.5% of the whole. Of those accused

of judaizing, 3.48% ended with death sentences, 1.83% being executed and 1.65% burned in effigy¹⁰. Over three-quarters of the crypto-Jews burned at the stake in Spain came from the initial period from 1480 to 1530. The total figure for executions of crypto-Jews in Spain is probably between 2,000 and 2,500. This figure does not include those burned in effigy, after conviction in their absence, a common Inquisition procedure.

In 11 tribunals in Castile from 1547 to 1695, there were 16,441 cases brought, of whom 3,495 (21.3%) were accused of judaizing. In ten tribunals in Aragon between 1539 and 1791, among 25,773 cases brought, 940 (3.6%) were for judaizing¹¹. In Valencia, in the first 40 years of the Inquisition, 91.6% of the cases concerned accusations of judaizing; of the 2,160 accused, 909 were condemned to death. From 1540 to 1820, only 100 judaizers were tried, and 7 executed (over half between 1701 and 1730)¹².

For Portugal, greater accuracy seems to be possible. Roth speaks of 1, 175 persons executed, 633 burned in effigy and 29,590 reconciled¹³.

In all, the Inquisition of Mexico City convicted about 1,500 persons of “judaizing”, of whom just under ten percent were burned at the stake. Precise statistics are available for the Inquisition of Cartagena (Colombia) for the period between 1610 and 1697 showing 87 cases of judaizing out of 731 accused, as against 155 cases of superstition, 82 for heresy (Protestants), 80 for blasphemy and 71 for bigamy.

¹⁰ Henningsen, cited in Gitlitz, p. 76.

¹¹ Figures from Gitlitz, p. 76.

¹² The figures for Valencia come from Gitlitz, p. 75. The second period figures for Valencia are so much lower, because it was not an area in which the Portuguese crypto-Jews sought refuge.

¹³ Roth, p. 124.

Of the 4 victims executed, 3 were crypto-Jews. Of 105 reconciled, 37 were cases of judaizing¹⁴.

One estimate for the American colonies is that about 3,000 judaizers were tried in the Spanish colonies, and about 1,000 were arrested in Brazil¹⁵. Marcelo Miranda Guimarães lists 18 names from Brazil of persons burned at the stake in Lisbon between 1647 and 1748¹⁶

¹⁴ Statistics taken from Fermina Alvarez Alonso “Panorámica de la Actividad Inquisitorial en Cartagena de Indias (Siglo XVII)” in Agostino Borromeo (ed.) *L’Inquisizione*, p. 287.

¹⁵ Lewin, cited in Gitlitz, p. 76.

¹⁶ Marcelo Mirando Guimarães, *Ha Restauracao para os Marranos e Christaos-Novos Brasileros, os separados da Casa de Israel?*, p. 78.

Part III

The Life of the Crypto-Jews

An account of the crypto-Jews can easily become just a study of the Inquisition. However, for the purposes of Jewish-Christian reconciliation, it is important to get some feel of what life was like for those who outwardly were obliged to profess the Catholic faith but who in secret affirmed their Jewish identity. This section aims to give a general impression of crypto-Jewish life in Spain, Portugal and Latin America during the whole period of enforced Catholic observance for the baptized Jews.

Three periods need to be distinguished: (1) from 1391 to 1480; (2) from 1480 until 1492; and (3) from 1492 until the suppression of the Inquisition. The first two periods only concern Spain, but the third period concerns the whole Iberian peninsula and colonial Latin America.

From 1391 to 1480

During this period, the baptized Jews, variously called *conversos* and “New Christians”, lived in towns and cities alongside the rest of the Jewish community. Many families had been divided by the baptismal font. Almost all Jewish families in Spain had *converso* relatives, and almost all *converso* families had relatives in the ongoing Jewish community.

During this period, the “New Christians” who continued Jewish practice could do so without much danger provided that they were discreet. There seems to have been widespread attendance from both communities at major family events such as circumcisions and baptisms, marriages and funerals. Many *converso* women continued

to observe the Jewish laws concerning hygiene and visited the *mikvah*, the bath of the Jewish community, for ritual ablutions. Many utilized the services of the Jewish community to obtain kosher meat. During this time the judaizing *conversos* had no difficulty in learning about Jewish life and practice, retaining access to Jewish sources and literature. Alongside them were their relatives and old acquaintances in the Jewish community, with rabbi and synagogue. Even at this stage, the judaizers to some degree lived a double life, as any deliberate abstention from observance of the Catholic faith would have drawn attention and been punishable, even before the establishment of the Inquisition.

From 1480 to 1492

In this period, the Jewish community was still there, but now also there was the Inquisition, which aimed to uproot all Jewish practice among the “New Christians”. Interaction between the two communities becomes dangerous. But the resources for learning and understanding are still there. Secrecy becomes essential, and the crypto-Jewish community faces new questions, for example concerning the upbringing of their children (see below). Most of the new questions concerned how much of their Jewish practice could be continued in secret, and how much was too dangerous to continue.

From the Expulsion in 1492 until the Suppression of the Inquisition

With the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain, the situation of the *conversos* is drastically changed. First, their number is augmented by many newly-baptized Jews with strong motives for ongoing judaizing, those who chose conversion over exile. Second,

all the Jewish resources in terms of literature and rabbinic expertise are gone. It is too dangerous to retain any Jewish prayer books or copies of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Third, the crypto-Jewish phenomenon develops in Portugal in a strong form. Then it spreads to the Spanish and the Portuguese colonies, especially in Latin America. There had never been a licit Jewish presence in the colonies, and so from the outset judaizing is prohibited and in due course pursued by the Inquisition and its minions.

With the passing of the pre-expulsion generation, judaizers had a much harder time retaining a knowledge of Jewish beliefs and practice. Their resources were now reduced to four: (1) the Latin Old Testament, used by the Catholic Church, which includes the books known by Protestants as “the Apocrypha”; (2) the long lists of incriminating Jewish practices, published by the Inquisition in its “Edicts of Grace”; (3) information brought back by *converso* travelers from places where Judaism could be freely practiced (many merchants and businessmen came to Mexico from non-Iberian Europe) and (4) memories passed on orally from generation to generation. The Catholic authorities were suspicious of vernacular translations of the Bible. From its beginning in the mid-sixteenth century the index of prohibited books issued by the Inquisition banned all vernacular translations of the Bible, even those by Catholics. As a result, the only licit biblical text was the Latin Vulgate. Especially in the generations immediately after the expulsion, the level of education and linguistic ability in the Jewish community was high, and each city would have had learned *conversos*, who could instantly translate the Vulgate into Spanish.

In this situation two processes were at work. First, there was a diminishing contact with the Jewish tradition. Memories became distorted, and so crypto-Jewish practice began to acquire distinctive

traits of its own. As we shall see, some developments represented a fusion of Jewish and Catholic elements. Second, the danger of detection led to an increasing crypto-Jewish focus on forms of abstinence (fasting, not eating pork, not doing Catholic things) rather than positive observance that would be much harder to hide. Dissimulation became a way of life.

The passing on of the Jewish heritage to the next generation was always a major concern of the crypto-Jews, as in Judaism generally: “And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children” (Deut. 6: 6 – 7). This concern was particularly carried by the mothers and the grandmothers in cases of “mixed marriages” involving “new” and “old” Christians. Gitlitz well expresses the dilemma facing parents and relatives concerning when to tell their children about the secret family heritage: “If the subject were broached too soon, before the child was old enough to be discreet, the family’s covert judaizing could be revealed to the neighborhood. If the subject were left until the child’s Christian education had taken firm hold, then the child might well denounce the family.”¹

Being obliged to profess the Catholic faith publicly, to attend Mass and to hear Catholic preaching, meant that only the most determined opposition to everything Catholic was likely to exclude all Christian influence. Apart from the *conversos* who chose to assimilate, whether or not from personal religious conviction, there were many who were simply confused. Some felt divided in themselves, and torn between conflicting obligations.

¹ Gitlitz, p. 222.

Crypto-Jewish Practice

As pre-expulsion Spanish Jewry had a strong social network of Jewish societies and organizations, it was natural for the crypto-Jews to organize themselves in their new-found situation of isolation and suspicion. Especially in the first half-century after the expulsion, most places with a number of *converso* families had “synagogues” established within the houses of the most committed and most well-to-do. Generally, a room on an upper level or in the interior of the house was set apart for religious purposes, but without the decoration normally found in a synagogue.

For the crypto-Jews, the most important Jewish observances were the Sabbath, Yom Kippur and Passover, generally in that order. This pattern reflected not only the importance of these celebrations in all Jewish life, but also their significance for the crypto-Jews in their affliction and danger and the place of the home in their observance. The home was the least dangerous place for judaizing practices, though the more affluent crypto-Jews often had Gentile servants, from whose eyes it was wise to hide everything Jewish.

At the center of crypto-Jewish observance was the Sabbath. The patterns of Sabbath observance were among the least variable of crypto-Jewish practices throughout the long history of oppression in the Spanish and Portuguese territories. As in orthodox Jewish homes today, the family prepared on the Friday for the welcoming of the Sabbath, like the welcoming of a bride. The house was swept and cleaned, clean linen put out, shopping completed, food prepared for the Sabbath, and the family members bathed and prepared clean clothes, generally the best, ready for the opening of the Sabbath on Friday evening after sundown. All these practices were listed as signs of judaizing by the Inquisition in the Edicts of Grace. Many

judaizers also fasted on Friday in preparation for the Sabbath, a practice popular in Latin America.

The heart of the Sabbath was the welcoming of the Sabbath on the Friday evening, at which the family gathered around the table, often with some friends, and the Sabbath light was lit. The secret lighting of the Sabbath lamp was a distinguishing mark of crypto-Jewish observance. Sometimes to reduce the chance of detection, the lamps were lit in a bedroom or placed under a table, for they had to be left burning until they went out. Often the window of the room where the light was burning would be covered with a dark cloth.

Passover was also an important celebration for the crypto-Jews, more so than the feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) and certainly than the feast of Weeks (Shavuot). Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian oppression, and so for the crypto-Jews it affirmed their identity with the escapees from Egypt, and articulated their hope for their own deliverance. The biblical requirement to roast and consume a whole lamb was taken seriously by the crypto-Jews, as was the baking of unleavened *matza* bread. The Inquisition records mention the many subterfuges performed in order to hide the fact that they were not eating leavened bread for a whole week.

Because of the dangers of overt Jewish practice, the crypto-Jews gave added importance to the observance of Jewish fasts. Two fasts became especially important, Yom Kippur and the “fast of Esther”. Not only was fasting inherently more difficult to detect and to prove than positive practice, but the meaning of both observances resonated strongly with the persecuted crypto-Jewish community. Yom Kippur was known to the crypto-Jews by various names, but most commonly as “the great Fast”. As an occasion

when the Jewish people confessed their sin, personal and corporate, before the all-holy God, Yom Kippur resonated with the crypto-Jews, who experienced a deep need to confess their duplicity in outwardly practicing a faith in which they did not believe. Sometimes the crypto-Jews changed the date when they kept the Yom Kippur fast, because Inquisition spies were especially vigilant on the appointed day.

However, the story of Esther was the biblical episode with which the crypto-Jews under Spanish or Portuguese rule particularly identified. Esther lived a hidden Jewish life in the palace of the pagan king Ahasuerus at a time when the whole Jewish community was endangered by the machinations of Haman. Whereas in general Jewish practice, the fast is preliminary to the feast of Purim celebrating the overthrow of Haman, the crypto-Jews had no deliverance yet to celebrate, and so for them the fast of Esther became the heart of Purim.

The crypto-Jews had access to the Catholic Bible, which contains a longer version of the book of Esther. In this longer version, the crypto-Jews found this prayer of Esther before she risked her life by going unsummoned before the king: “Remember, O Lord; make thyself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage, O king of the gods and master of all dominion! Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him. But save us by thy hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but thee, O Lord. Thou hast knowledge of all things; and thou knowest that I hate the splendor of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien. Thou knowest my necessity – that I abhor the sign of my proud position, which is upon my head in these days when I appear in public. I

abhor it like a menstros rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. And thy servant has not eaten at Haman's table, and I have not honored the king's feast or drunk the wine of his libations. Thy servant has had no joy since the day that I was brought here until now, except in thee, O Lord God of Abraham. O God, whose might is over all, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!" (Esther 14: 12 – 19)². It is not hard to imagine how this prayer spoke to the hearts of the crypto-Jews, who hated the splendor of the Church, whose necessity to conform outwardly was known to the Lord, and who prayed to be delivered from fear of the Inquisition and its informers.

The dietary laws of the Torah were observed more fully in the first generations after the expulsion, but in some places they continued well into the seventeenth century. In Spain, some crypto-Jewish circles had their own slaughter rituals. But it was with the approach of death that there was a particular care to observe the Jewish rites, so the Inquisition records are full of reports concerning the food prepared for funeral gatherings and especially with the ablutions and purifications performed after contact with the dead.

Hostility to Catholic Practices

Much crypto-Jewish behavior reflected the tension of being required to practice what they not only did not believe, but had come to abhor. So the chief doctrines and symbols of Catholic Christianity became abhorrent to the crypto-Jews: in particular the Trinity, the person of Jesus, the crucifix, the sacraments, images of Mary and the Saints. They often showed their disdain for these doctrines and practices by vigorous denial and by words and actions regarded as

² RSV enumeration.

blasphemous by the Catholic authorities. Many cases were brought before the Inquisition of crypto-Jews accused of spitting when the name of Jesus was spoken, of trampling on a crucifix, of impugning the virgin birth and the honor of Mary, of not consuming the host at Mass but disposing of it afterwards.

In particular, it was common for crypto-Jewish families after the baptism of a child in church to return to the home, and to solemnly scrub off the holy oil, as a ritual repudiation of the church rite. Many judaizing *conversos* did their utmost to refuse the last rites of the Catholic Church as they approached death. For them this was their final statement concerning their Jewish faith and loyalty.

Christian Influence

Cut off from contact with their own people, and obliged to conform to Catholic practice, it was not surprising that crypto-Jewish thinking and practice began to be influenced by Christian ideas. The most obvious example is the way in which personal salvation became important for the crypto-Jews. Salvation was central in the thinking of the Inquisition. Horrible and repulsive as its methods were, it remains true that the official processes of the Inquisition were driven by concerns about salvation³. It was believed that the crypto-Jews were endangering their salvation by Jewish belief and practice, and so the efforts of the Inquisition were directed toward obtaining a confession of the “sin” of judaizing, and for first-time offenders “reconciling” them to the Church. Even with repeat-offenders, destined for the stake, repeated efforts were made by priests up to the last moment to obtain a confession in view of their salvation.

³ As mentioned in Part II, the actual functioning of the Inquisition also brought other motives into play, such as personal revenge on enemies or the desire of those in power to confiscate the properties of the victims.

In these circumstances, the crypto-Jews came to focus on personal salvation in a way that was foreign to the Jewish tradition. But they saw their salvation as coming from the Law of Moses, not from Jesus Christ. In the midst of their suffering, and particularly as they awaited their fate in prison, crypto-Jews believed that their salvation depended on fidelity to the Law of Moses. Many fasted so that they would be saved on the day of judgment. There are even Marrano statements that speak of Moses as their Savior; statements clearly coming out of a “Moses not Jesus” frame of thinking. In a similar way, many crypto-Jews came to speak of heaven and hell. It was also common for them to pray and to fast for their deceased relatives and friends.

An Example from Spain

The Mora family from the La Mancha area south of Madrid provides a good example of a Marrano family passing on their secret Jewish heritage from generation to generation⁴. We also know more about their practice, because of the unusual degree of detail unearthed by the inquisitors.

In 1590, Francisco de la Mora was burned at the stake in Cuenca for judaizing, together with his niece Beatriz. On their way to execution, sticks and stones were thrown at them by the mob. Francisco was hit on the head and part of his brain fell out on the collar worn by a bystander, who tore off the garment stained by the brains of a Jew. His son was arrested by the Inquisition in Cuenca in 1622, but after “repentance” for his sin, he was “reconciled”. After his release from prison, the son fled to France. His son in turn, known

⁴ The information on the Mora family is primarily taken from Henry Méchoulan, *Les Juifs du Silence au Siècle d'Or Espagnol*.

as Antonio Enriquez Gomez, born around 1600, became a successful merchant and a well-known dramatist, the author of popular comedies performed on the stage in Madrid. Like his father and grandfather, Gomez was a convinced judaizer, who also introduced his “old Christian” wife to his Jewish practices. He was summoned before the Inquisition in Madrid in 1634, but only to act as a witness in another trial. However, he scented danger and escaped to Bordeaux in France. In Bordeaux, Gomez joined a secret Marrano circle, nonetheless observed by the spies of the Inquisition, whom he soon began to denounce in clandestine writings.

After living in Rouen, in northern France, from 1643 to 1650, Gomez decided for business reasons to return to Spain. He planned to go straight to the Inquisition, to confess his heresy and be reconciled, hoping thereby to escape imprisonment and confiscation of his goods. However, his brother-in-law, a Catholic priest and an official of the Inquisition, placing family loyalty above church duty, dissuaded him, arguing that the dossier against him was too detailed for such a plan to succeed. Gomez then lived in Seville for ten years without detection, taking the family name of his mistress. During this time he was condemned in absentia by the Inquisition of Toledo, based on evidence sent by the spies in Bordeaux, and burned in effigy in 1651, together with the effigy of his father already dead. New mandates for his arrest were issued in 1652, 1653 and 1658. In 1660, at a spectacular *auto de fe* in Seville, Gomez had the unusual experience of seeing himself burnt in effigy a second time. But it was not long before parallels between his comedies under his former name and under his new name led to his arrest. Gomez decided to confess his heresy and seek reconciliation. But before his sentence, he fell gravely ill, and was reconciled in his prison cell before dying there in May 1663. With the thoroughness of the Inquisition, Gomez was reconciled “in effigy” at an *auto de fe* in 1665. In the same

year as Gomez died, his cousin, Francisco Luis Enriquez de Mora was arrested by the Inquisition of Lima in Peru in 1663, where references to Gomez and his Jewish practice appear in the records of this trial.

The lifestyle of the Mora family was centered around the weekly observance of the Sabbath, always kept with new linen and their best clothes. Francisco de la Mora reports how he was taught to wear the tallith at times of prayer. The records do not show how they observed the Seder or Sabbath. The three ancient feasts were kept; Passover, the Feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles, but not Rosh Hashana, Simhat Tora or Hanukkah. Fasts played an important part in their life, with great importance being attached to Yom Kippur and the preceding ten days of penitence. They observed the fast of Esther just before Purim, but the fast was more important than the feast. The Jewish fasts associated with the destruction of the Temple were not observed.

An Example from Mexico

In Mexico City in the mid-seventeenth century, there were two major circles of crypto-Jews. The larger group gathered around Simon Vaez Sevilla, and his mother-in-law, Blanca Enriquez. The second group gathered around the matriarchal figure of Leonor Nunez. A brief account of her family connections of which there are substantial records will give an added sense of the Marrano way of life⁵.

Leonor Nunez was born around 1585 in Madrid to parents of Portuguese origin. Her father was an “Old Christian”, and her mother a “New Christian”. Her mother was imprisoned by the Inquisition of

⁵ The information on Leonor Nunes and her family is primarily taken from Nathan Wachtel, *La Foi du Souvenir: Labyrinthes Marranes*.

Toledo in 1634, and burnt in effigy at an *auto de fe* in Mexico in 1635. Leonor was married three times and twice widowed: first with church dispensation to a cousin, also of *converso* stock; second to Pedro Lopez, the widower of her first husband's sister; and thirdly around 1630 in Mexico to another Marrano. Leonor had two children by each of her first two husbands: first, two daughters, Ana Gomez and Isabel Nunez; and secondly, a daughter and a son, Maria Gomez and Francisco Lopez Blandon. Not only Leonor, but all her children would become victims of the Inquisition.

When news came around 1603 that several members of her first husband's family had been arrested by the Inquisition, Leonor and several other relatives fled to South-West France. Her first husband traveled frequently to Spain on business, and in fact died there around 1609. She was visited in France by two men, just returned from a business trip to Mexico: one was an elder brother of Leonor, and the second her next husband to be. In 1613, Leonor was part of a family group of crypto-Jews, who set sail for Mexico. The group included her second husband, her two daughters from her first marriage, her mother, another brother and a younger brother of her first husband. Leonor's two children by Pedro Lopez were born in Mexico.

A crisis arose in the business affairs of Pedro Lopez around 1619, when he was unable to meet his debts because a cargo he had consigned to Spain was confiscated by the Inquisition when his business associate in Seville was arrested for judaizing. Despite the risks of a former prisoner of the Inquisition appearing before the tribunal to request the return of his cargo, Lopez traveled to Seville and succeeded in his quest. In Spain, Lopez met Francisco Botello, a nephew of Leonor's first husband, and in 1620 brought Botello and his father back to Mexico. Francisco Botello was later to be-

come one of the renowned martyrs among the Marranos, being burned alive for his total refusal to renounce Judaism.

In the 1620s, Leonor Nunez was never very long in one city. First, she accompanied her husband when he moved for business reasons, and after his death in 1625 she lived with sons-in-law and daughters, before returning definitively to Mexico City in 1630, where she married her third husband⁶. From this point, she and her son-in-law, Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte (1592 - 1649), were the key figures at the center of their Marrano network. He had married Maria Gomez, the daughter from Leonor's second marriage, when she was only about thirteen. Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte had been through the Inquisition's hands in 1624 – 25, when he had been arrested, tried and “reconciled”.

The Inquisition records of Mexico City testify to the huge influence of Leonor Nunez. Above all, she taught the Jewish practices she knew to her immediate family circle and taught them Jewish prayers and prayer postures. She was renowned for having dreams and revelations, as well as for her frequent fasts⁷. Her family held her in awe as like an angel on earth, a holy mystic communing with God. She was assiduous in assuring Jewish funeral and burial rites for the dead. The importance of the strong women in crypto-Jewish life reflected both the importance of the home as the center of Jewish practice and the frequent absences of the men on commercial business.

Leonor Nunez was first arrested by the Inquisition in 1634, together with most of her household, except for two daughters who had voluntarily confessed their judaizing. Among the charges against Leonor

⁶ Pedro Lopez was burned in effigy in 1635 ten years after his death.

⁷ It seems that there was a strong erotic element present in some of the communal fasting in the circle of Leonor Nunez that she did not discourage.

was a denunciation to the Inquisition of Lima in 1623 by a crypto-Jew to whom she had given refuge in Mexico two years earlier and who testified to being present at a family observance of Yom Kippur. During the process and trial, they sought to appear humble and repentant. They were then “reconciled” in 1635, with Leonor being sentenced to a short spell in prison.

A new and more severe wave of repression began in 1642, but it was only in October 1644 that Leonor Nunez, Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte and others in the family were again arrested and thrown in prison. The following month Leonor was quite ill. In the prisons spies and “plants” were used to record the conversations of the prisoners. Leonor’s name was often mentioned by others, but there are few records of her own suffering. After four and a half years in prison, Leonor and 12 others are “relaxed” and sentenced to be burned at the stake. The others who died with her included her two daughters, Ana and Maria⁸, her son, and her son-in-law, Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte. The latter was burned alive, after confessing that he was a Jew, who wished to live and die in the law of Moses. When the sentences had been read out, the records speak of *una viejezuela* (a little old lady) among the condemned – obviously Leonor Nunez – about whom her son-in-law prays “Remember the mother of the Maccabees.”

The Aftermath

Although over two centuries have passed since the last arrests and trials of crypto-Jews, there is much evidence to indicate that “Marranism” did not end with the abolition of the Inquisition. The patterns of secrecy and dissimulation, and even of “double allegiance”,

⁸ Leonor’s third daughter, Isabel, had already died and she was burned in effigy on the same day.

had become so deep-rooted psychologically and socially that many Marrano patterns have continued among their descendants even to the present day. Mention has already been made of the crypto-Jewish communities in some mountainous villages of northern Portugal. A remnant of the Xuetas, the *conversos* of the island of Majorca, have survived in the city of Palma.

It is in Latin America and among Hispanics in the south-west of the United States that the ongoing effects of Marrano heritage are most evident. There are still “whole colonies of Marrano families” in northern New Mexico⁹. Jacobs, who has studied patterns of adaptation among Hispanics of Marrano ancestry, cites a woman’s cry about New Mexico: “Oh! Land of Enchantment you have closed your eyes for so many years, when are you going to let my people go? Haven’t you done enough with your enchantment and superstitions? Let’s start with our last names they all seem to be Sephardic names. Why have you kept this secret from our children? How else will we know who we are or where we are going if we don’t truly know who we are. ... Oh! Land of Enchantment you had five hundred years to take away our religion our language and our heritage. I must say you almost succeeded.”¹⁰

In Latin America, a number of those attracted to Messianic Jewish congregations are discovering their Marrano ancestry. The Messianic movement can have an obvious appeal to those who believe in Jesus Christ, but also value their Jewish heritage. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the leader of the Messianic Jewish community, Marcelo Miranda Guimaraes has founded ABRADJIN, the Brazilian Association for the Descendants of the Jews from the Inquisition.

⁹ Gitlitz, p. 518.

¹⁰ Janet Liebman Jacobs, *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*, p. 150.

Guimarães himself recalls the patterns surviving in his own family, that included:

1. Marriage among relatives with the same blood line. Parents introduced their children to their own relatives. In my case, for example, I'm the sixth generation of a continuous blood line. My father is my mother's cousin, my grandparents were also cousins...
2. Following the Jewish calendar, based on the phases of the moon (Ps. 104:19), and relating them to the agricultural cycle.
3. Leaving a remainder of grains in the ploughing for the poor, a recommendation of the Torah followed by the Crypto-Jews.
4. On the doors, where there should be a *mezuzah*, they placed a cross, so people passing by could see that a "Christian" lived in that house.
5. My ancestors had their children educated in Catholic or Protestant Schools, to prove their pseudo-Christianity.
6. They would say they were Catholics, but did not attend the mass, nor did participate in any other Catholic ceremonies or activities.
7. Since they could not keep the Sabbath publicly, they would light candles on Fridays as if they were to the Catholic Saints. They also took a bath on Saturdays and wore new clothes;
8. They kept mourning (the Jewish *sheva*), during seven days. The mourning was observed for one year.

9. To disguise their Jewishness, they hung pork sausages on the windows facing the street. They did not eat them, but intended to show that in that house there were “Christians” who ate pork.
10. They killed their animals for consumption, but buried the blood, according to the principles of the Torah¹¹.

The story of the crypto-Jews of Spain, Portugal and Latin America is not simply an issue of history long passed and mostly forgotten. The consequences of this tragic history live on in the lives of their descendants, many of whom are still confused about their real identity and are still suffering the effects of rejection and marginalization.

¹¹ Information given to the author by Marcelo Miranda Guimarães.

Part IV

The Issues for Toward Jerusalem Council II

Why is the issue of the Marranos important for the Toward Jerusalem Council II (TJCII) initiative? It may help to contrast what some have called the two “great wounds” of the Jewish people: the Holocaust and Spain (the Marranos).

The Holocaust was the work of a Jew-hating regime that sought to exterminate all the Jewish people within its power. The Christian church carries a heavy responsibility for making possible the historical situation in which such a pathological hatred of the Jewish people could develop and for the weakness of its response to such an horrendous atrocity. By contrast, the oppression of the Marranos was a chosen policy of the Church.

The elimination of all Jewish practice among the Marranos was a work of the Catholic Church in alliance with the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, whose power extended to their newly-established colonies, most extensive in Latin America. While all Jewish suffering at the hands of Catholic peoples and the Church has to be addressed for the healing of relationships between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people as a whole, the distinctive pattern of the oppression of the Marranos directly affects the TJCII vision for the reconciliation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ. The Marrano question concerns TJCII because the Catholic treatment of the Marranos was the most systematic and ruthless attempt in Christian history since the time of Marcion in the second century to remove everything explicitly Jewish from the life of the Church.

The vision of TJCII affirms the rightness and the necessity of both Jewish and Gentile witness to Jesus Christ. Its vision for the reconciliation of Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles, both personally and corporately, depends on a repudiation of the age-long “replacement” teaching that God has rejected the Jewish people, and that the Church has taken the place of the Jews as the chosen covenant people. A practical consequence of this teaching was the assumption, shared by both Church and synagogue, that it was impossible to be Jewish and a believer in Jesus Christ at the same time. The determined effort to eliminate all “judaizing” was based on this conviction.

One major consequence of replacement teaching, operative in effect from the fourth century, was the requirement that Jewish converts to Christianity renounce their Jewish identity and cease all Jewish practice. The experience of the Marranos represents the only time in the history of the Church that large numbers of Jews were baptized and officially became church members¹. This episode represents the biggest counter-witness in church history to the New Testament vision of the “one new man” in Christ that TJCII is reclaiming (see Eph. 2: 15).

The history of the *conversos* touches directly the issue of the right relationship between Jews and Gentiles within the one church. As previous sections have shown, this history is complex, and it is difficult to make generalizations that apply to the entire history in all the nations affected. The most complicated aspect concerns the actual beliefs of the baptized Jews. It is impossible now to determine all their belief-patterns with precision, but it is possible to offer a clas-

¹ This was first the case in Spain between 1391 and 1420, and again in 1492, and was repeated in Portugal in 1497.

² Gitlitz has his own classification: “Many newly-baptized Christians continued to Judaize and to self-identify as Jews. Some practiced both religions in an unstable mix. Some believed in neither. Some tried as hard as they could to assimilate to Christian ways.” (p. 563).

sification of the different patterns of behavior found among the *conversos*. It seems that at least four different categories can be identified²: (a) those Jews who were baptized, who in no way accepted the Catholic faith, who repudiated at home what they had professed outwardly in church, and who sought to maintain a Jewish identity and practice in secret; (b) those Jews who were baptized, who did not believe in the Catholic faith that they outwardly observed, but who did not make any effort to continue regular Jewish practice; (c) those Jews who were baptized, and who practiced the Catholic faith, but were confused in their minds as to what they really believed; (d) those Jews who were baptized, and who accepted the Catholic faith in the same way that the “Old Christians” had accepted their faith³.

The first and the last categories are the most significant in relation to the TJCII vision. Most of the Inquisition’s victims belonged to the first category. Those who regularly continued Jewish practice in secret were always likely to feature prominently among the accused and those found guilty, as the Inquisition was established to detect and eliminate such practice. But there were also victims among the other categories, because denunciations were anonymous, and this encouraged assumption of guilt by association as well as false accusations arising from personal enmity. Some *conversos*, who were believing Catholics (category d), also suffered at the hands of the Inquisition. For example, Francisco de Victoria, the first bishop of Tucuman, Argentina, and later Archbishop of Mexico, was accused of corruption and judaizing, and was eventually recalled to Madrid, where he died. Victoria was cleared of both charges after his death. One priest of *converso*

³ It is not helpful to try and read into the Catholic practice of that time ideas of personal conversion that come from a different period and culture (e.g. to apply Evangelical Christian concepts of conversion to the baptized Jews to determine who really believed in Christ and who didn’t).

descent, Luis de Leon, wrote a famous devotional work, *The Names of Christ*, during his four years in the Inquisition's prison at Valladolid.

Because the vision of TJCII is the reconciliation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, the sins of the past with which TJCII is directly concerned are those against the unity of Jew and Gentile in the one body. These evils remain major obstacles to Jewish and Gentile reconciliation as long as they have not been clearly recognized and publicly confessed. We will look in turn at the two major categories that in their different ways constitute major stumbling blocks: (1) the baptized Jews who in no way accepted the Christian faith interiorly, and who continued a Jewish practice; and (2) the baptized Jews who did believe in Jesus Christ, but who were forbidden to do anything Jewish.

1. The baptized Jews who in no way accepted the Christian faith interiorly, and who continued a Jewish practice.

In what ways does the treatment of this group, the “crypto-Jews”, go beyond the maltreatment of the Jewish people in general at the hands of Christians and at the hands of the Church? First, the Church's acceptance that the baptisms of Jews, even under severe social pressure and threats of violence, were judged to be valid resulted in these *conversos* being treated as Catholics and as members of the Church subject to the discipline of the Church⁴. That is why “judaizing”, the continuation of any Jewish practice by a baptized person, was regarded as heresy, which was ultimately a capital offense. Secondly, the efforts of the Inquisition were directed to the salvation of the souls of the

⁴ The canonical ruling at that time was that baptisms were only invalid, if adult candidates were forcibly carried to the font against their will. If a Jew walked to the font and accepted baptism without protest, then the baptism was valid. In other words, at that time there was little understanding of how psychological pressure diminishes personal freedom.

accused, believed to be imperiled by such heresy, and so the main objective was to obtain a confession of the “sin” of judaizing. Hence, whatever degree of force and element of fear had been present in the process leading to baptism, pressure was used, and sometimes torture, to get these Jewish “converts” to profess afresh the faith in which they had never truly believed. This level of oppression, which lasted for some three hundred years, has no parallel in the history of the wider Jewish community⁵. The system of anonymous denunciation and the encouragement of spying had devastating effects on family life, which again, whatever their sufferings, has no precise parallel in the wider experience of the Jewish community.

Many Marranos who escaped to safety, whether for example to Amsterdam or to Salonika, two of their major destinations, immediately affirmed their total commitment to the Jewish religion, and formed Sephardic synagogues in their places of exile. But the experience of suffering during their years of enforced Catholicism strongly marked their attitudes and their religious practice. Prayers arising from their experience in Spain and Portugal found their way into the liturgy of the Sephardic synagogues. A second Christian symbol, that of baptism, became a stench in Jewish nostrils, as had earlier happened with the cross at the time of the Crusades.

A confession of the evils of the past needs to note the difference between the behavior of Catholics, individually and in groups, and the decisions and activities of Church authority. First, whatever the responsibility of church authority for the baptism of Jews under coercion and threat – and some church leaders

⁵ Maybe, the nearest parallel elsewhere is the treatment of the Beit Abraham, baptised people of Jewish origin, within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

protested against such baptisms, the subsequent insistence on the validity of these baptisms was a church decision, for which the church authorities bear responsibility. The procedures for dealing with alleged heresy and the actual sentencing of those found guilty were equally the responsibility of the Church. This is also shown by the terminology of “relaxation”: those found guilty and sentenced to death were “relaxed”, that is handed over by the Inquisition to the secular authorities for the actual execution, which nonetheless took place in association with a religious ceremony, the *auto de fe*.

Such a confession by the Church is important both for the descendants of the Marranos and for the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people in general. It would help to remove major obstacles to the Jewish people being able to recognize in the Church the face of their Messiah.

2. *The baptized Jews who became Catholic believers in Jesus Christ, but who were forced to repudiate their Jewish identity and to cut themselves off from their own people and heritage.*

The focus in the Marrano literature has naturally been on the Marranos as those baptized Jews, who were compelled under Spanish and Portuguese rule to profess a Catholic faith in which they did not believe. Not much attention has been given to those *conversos*, who came to some level of Christian faith, but who were forced to renounce their Jewish identity and heritage. This group illustrates other obstacles that the Marrano history places in the way of Gentile and Jewish reconciliation in Christ.

First, the *conversos* had to deny their Jewishness at the pouring of the baptismal water. Here we find in a more dramatic and problematic form the dilemma of all Jewish converts to Christianity throughout the centuries, who were forced to choose between Christ and their Jewishness: either accept Christ, renounce everything Jewish and be baptized, or remain a Jew and face the consequences. Many Jews, who genuinely came to faith in Christ, were literally torn in two, between their love for their people and their faith in their Messiah. But under the threat of the Inquisition, such converts lived under a regime of suspicion in which the slightest sign of Jewishness could lead, not just to deprivation of communion, but to arrest, imprisonment, torture and death. For the assumption was that any continuation of Jewish practice, even the smallest, proved that the convert did not believe in Christ. Today we can understand that such a position was psychologically naïve. The abandonment of the view that one cannot be Jewish and believe in Jesus alerts us to the possibility that some of the *conversos* who did believe in Christ desired in some inchoate way to retain a Jewish identity within their Catholic allegiance.

Secondly, although the *conversos* were officially Catholics and no longer Jews, they were rarely accepted as equals to the “Old Christians”. Paradoxically, the New Testament distinction between Jewish and Gentile members of the Church was maintained, but instead of being based on mutual respect and complementarity, there was disdain and contempt from the “Old Christians” (Gentiles) for the “New Christians” (still seen sociologically as Jews). Both these aspects are illustrated in the story of the converted Jews of Majorca in Spain, known as the Xueta, who centuries after the demise of the Inquisition still retained a distinct but not honored identity within the Catholic Church of Majorca.

Of the two aspects of the problem, the first came from church decisions banning all Jewish practice to converts, whereas the second arose more from popular prejudice. Thus, the first is more directly the responsibility of Church authority than the second.

In retrospect we can see that these distortions and perversions in the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers in Messiah (Christ) form a kind of caricature of the New Testament vision of the “one new man”, of Jew and Gentile being made one in the body of Christ. Because they constitute a major barrier to the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Messiah Jesus, the TJCII leadership is committed to promoting a Christian confession and repentance for all such evils. However, our confidence is in the Savior of the world, the Messiah of Israel, who shed his blood on the cross to bring about this reconciliation. The confession is a means, the reconciliation is the end.

Epilogue

The history of the crypto-Jews of Spain, Portugal and Latin America is one of the longest and saddest of the tragic periods that over the centuries stained the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. Because it is a story of arrogance and of accusation, the path of reconciliation has to be one of humility and the refusal to judge. Because it is a story of coercion and violence, the path of healing has to respect freedom of conscience and to renounce all violence, verbal as well as physical. Because it is a story of harsh judgment, the way forward has to be the way of mercy and forgiveness. But forgiveness requires that the full catalogue of sin and evil be truthfully confessed and acknowledged.

This history presents the greatest challenge to the Catholic Church. While a full and honest addressing of this history will always be difficult for the Church, the situation has been transformed by the courageous action of Pope John Paul II in calling on “the sons and daughters of the Church” to confess the sins of the past¹. As part of the Church’s preparation for the celebration of the year 2000, he wrote that the Catholic Church “cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act.”² The Pope specified two categories of past evil, particularly needing to be confessed: sins against unity, and sins of violence committed in the name of truth. The second category precisely fits the history of the Inquisition in Spain, Portugal and the Spanish colonies.

In response to the Pope’s call, two symposia of scholars from all faith backgrounds were held in the Vatican: the first to examine the

¹ In the letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (1994), paras. 33– 36.

² *Ibid.*, para. 33.

history of the treatment of the Jewish people through the centuries, and the second to study the Inquisition in particular. There was also a gathering in Lisbon in September 2000 at which the leader of the Catholic Church in Portugal, Cardinal José Policarpo, asked forgiveness for the sins against the Jewish and Muslim communities in the presence of the chief rabbi and the grand mufti of the nation. However, up to this point, the Catholic confessions have remained at a general level. They have not yet directly addressed the different levels of Catholic responsibility for this oppression of the Jewish people: the responsibility of church authority in general, the responsibility of kings and of government, the responsibility of those who worked for the Inquisition, the responsibility of preachers, the responsibility of the Catholic public in general.

All Christians recognize that any authentic confession of sin has to ask what forms of restitution are possible and appropriate. As has been indicated, the Marrano question does not only concern the past. There are many thousands of people of Marrano descent, particularly in Latin America and in the south-western United States, who are still struggling with their identity as a result of this history. Since the suffering of the Marranos resulted from coercion in religious practice, a genuine act of restitution needs to address the spiritual “captivity” to which they were subjected. Today the Catholic Church could speak an authoritative word to “set the captives free”, for example, by declaring that all descendants of those who were baptized under duress are free to decide on their religious affiliation and practice. In this way the descendants of the Marranos would be set free to decide on their religious affiliation and practice. There should be a freedom for the descendants of Marranos to rejoin the Jewish community (see below), for them to combine their Jewish identity with faith in Jesus Christ within the Messianic Jewish movement, or in any other way to follow their genuine convictions. Those convinced that they should remain in the Catholic Church need to

know that this is not incompatible with affirming a Jewish identity, as is now accepted for the Hebrew Catholics.

This issue also presents a challenge to the rabbis and to the Jewish people in general. The suffering of the Marranos also included the sense of rejection by the Jewish community. When people claiming Jewish descent seek to join a synagogue, the normal rabbinic practice is to require documentary evidence concerning their ancestry. Since the Marranos are unable to produce such evidence, by the nature of the oppression they suffered, they are not recognized as Jews. They are then offered the option of conversion, which many have refused as being unfaithful to the memory of their ancestors, who suffered and died for loyalty to their Jewish identity. The uncovering of this history also challenges the Jewish community to find ways to rectify this further injustice.

The deepest reasons for pursuing this issue are expressed in the TJCI Vision Statement: “The ultimate purpose in unifying the Body and restoring the Jewish believers to their rightful place is the hastening of the coming of the Lord Yeshua in glory and the full accomplishment of His work of redemption in the Kingdom of God.”

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