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THE IBERIAN INQUISITIONS IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

Between coercion and accommodation

Helen Rawlings

The Iberian Inquisitions, first established in the kingdom of Castile (1478), then in the Crown of Aragon (1484), and half a century later in neighbouring Portugal (1531) as a deterrent against the threat of heresy, soon gained a collective reputation as a metaphor for religious and racial intolerance that has left its indelible mark on Iberian identity in particular and the history of western civilization in general for more than 500 years. But the infamy of the Inquisition as an historical phenomenon has very often distorted the actual historiographical record, giving rise to an enormous volume of ‘black versus white’ polemical discourse, coloured by the ideological and political bias of writers, as opposed to measured analysis. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that a major turning point was reached in inquisitorial studies when the American scholar Henry Charles Lea became the first historian to make extensive use of the archives of the Spanish Inquisition to conduct his research. His application of critical, objective methodology to the evidence transformed the discourse. In his four-volume *History of the Inquisition of Spain* (1906–07), Lea challenged liberal and conservative interpretations that had characterised inquisitorial historiography since the sixteenth century. While he criticised the severity of its practices, he also acknowledged that the Spanish Inquisition had been established for reasons that were seen as legitimate in their time and advised modern historians to be cautious in their judgement of it. He thus set the agenda for revisionist scholarship that would follow in the second half of the twentieth century.

Since the transition from dictatorship to democracy in both Spain and Portugal, a new generation of historians, building upon Lea’s work, have set inquisitorial research on a variety of innovative pathways and overturned certain long-held preconceptions regarding its practices. Major work was undertaken in the closing decades of the twentieth century on the trial records of regional branches of the Spanish Inquisition (their working methods, spectrum of activity and purview) by pioneering historians such as Beinart (1981), Bennassar (1979), Contreras (1982), Dedieu (1989), García Arenal (1978), García Cárcel (1976, 1980), Haliczzer (1994); Henningsen (1980), Monter (1990), Nalle (1992) and Poska (1998). Revisionist overviews of the history of the Spanish Inquisition have been published by Kamen (1997), Peters (1988) and Rawlings (2006), while Bethencourt (1997), as an extension of his work on the Portuguese branch of the Inquisition, has invited scholars to consider the global impact of the institution

within a transnational context, including its pursuit of heresy in the overseas territories of the Iberian empire. As a result of the broadening of the panorama of inquisitorial research and its subjection to new techniques of interrogation, we can now perceive of the Iberian Inquisitions as being far more complex and less monolithic than has hitherto been understood, rather as multi-faceted bodies that skilfully adapted to time and circumstances, enabling the major Spanish branch to survive for more than 350 years.

Modern research also suggests that the Castilian, Aragonese and Portuguese inquisitions encountered distinct challenges in the exercise of their jurisdiction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, contrary to common understanding, were far more restrained than repressive in the practice of their authority. This was the period that witnessed the height of inquisitorial activity throughout the peninsula, but in the pursuit of their primary role – the elimination of heresy – Iberian tribunals found themselves increasingly conditioned by prevailing social, political and economic factors that determined the nature of their mediation. They responded by moderating, accommodating and realigning their practices, sometimes adopting corrective and conciliatory policies and at other times coercive measures in their dealings with different offenders of the faith, in accordance with the agenda set by the Church, Monarchy and State. This chapter focuses on the intervention of the Iberian Inquisitions in relation to three principal target groups, each addressed within a different time frame and regional context – the Old Christian, the *Morisco* and the Portuguese *converso* – that will allow us to evaluate the relative as opposed to absolute nature of the institution's power base in the early modern period.

The correction of old Christian ignorance and deviance

During the first half of the sixteenth century the Holy Office only had jurisdiction over formal heresy (Judaic, Islamic and Protestant), but from the 1560s onwards the Spanish branch of the Inquisition extended its sphere of activity to lesser infringements of the code of orthodoxy. In response to the Council of Trent's recommendations on doctrine and discipline, approved in its final session of 1562–63, Castilian and Aragonese tribunals intervened to correct the speech, beliefs and behavioural practices of the Old Christian (principally the rural masses), that veered from the accepted norm. Tens of thousands of Spaniards came before inquisitorial courts for the first time in the second half of the sixteenth century accused of acts of "minor heresy." Among the most common offences that figured under this category was the making of irreverent statements, known as "propositions," frequently based on a misunderstanding of true doctrine. Others were charged with the associated and potentially more serious crime of blasphemy. Blasphemous statements might include a denial of the power of the sacraments, disrespect of Mary and the Saints, opposition to tithes payments, the rejection of papal and/or inquisitorial authority and a refusal to observe official feast days. These same objections to aspects of the faith overlapped with those expressed by *conversos* and *Moriscos*, as well as alleged Protestants who were brought to trial by the Spanish Inquisition in the mid-sixteenth century, and the campaign against propositions within the Old Christian community may have been a precautionary warning about the possibility of contagion. In the case of Protestant offenders, such transgressions invariably led to their prosecution according to the degree of heresy deemed to be involved (Dedieu 1979, 269–271; Schwartz 2008, 24). However, where Old Christians were concerned, despite the obvious anti-religious and anti-authoritarian overtones of these statements, they were frequently judged by the inquisitors to have been uttered in anger, frustration, jest or simply out of habit, demonstrative of the naïve mentality

or ignorance of the individual and hence devoid of any real heretical intent. As a result, minor penalties were generally applied, such as a fine or public penance rather than imprisonment. Nevertheless, culprits had to be singled out to serve as a lesson to others and to demonstrate Spain's leadership in restoring the Church's teaching mission. While the Church instructed, the Inquisition corrected, supporting and reinforcing the pedagogical role of bishops and priests. According to Contreras and Henningsen's data bank of inquisitorial trials (1986), in the second half of the sixteenth century (1560–1614), hearings for blasphemy and for the associated crime of propositions accounted for 45% of cases brought before Castilian tribunals and 27% of those in neighbouring Aragon (heavily preoccupied with its *Morisco* subjects), while in Portugal such offences were dealt with by ecclesiastical courts. The tribunal of Toledo took a leading role in the campaign to silence the verbal outbursts of its Old Christian clients. Its 'success' as an instrument of social disciplining can be measured by the 85% decline in such anti-doctrinal statements being brought before the local tribunal between 1551 and 1560 (486) and 1591 and 1600 (74) (Dedieu 1986, 181–182).

Two examples of trial records serve to underline the nature of religious deviance to be found at the local level in Castile, which the propositions campaign sought to eliminate. Bartolomé Sánchez was a struggling Castilian wool-comber from the village of Cardenete in the diocese of Cuenca, brought before the local tribunal of the Inquisition on a charge of heresy in 1553 (Nalle 2001). Following a visionary experience which led first to penance then rebellion, Sánchez began to expound his own radical ideas about doctrine. He attacked priests, the worship of idols, the celebration of the Eucharist, the payment of tithes and the authority of the Pope. He believed he spoke for God and that his mission, which he equated to that of the second Messiah, was to correct the injustices delivered on Spanish society by the Inquisition and the Catholic Church. While his neighbours tolerated his outbursts as symptomatic of his eccentricity, local inquisitors arrested him on a charge of heresy. The inquisitor assigned to his case, Pedro Cortés, took sympathy with Sánchez and sought via his hearings with the prisoner to rehabilitate him, attempting to correct his erroneous beliefs. Sánchez's obstructive behaviour, extending to his rewording of Christian prayers to reflect his prophetic relationship with God, did not deter Cortés in trying to prove that the defendant was insane rather than deviant. But the compassionate strategy failed. Sánchez refused to be tamed and he was sentenced to death for his views. However, en route to the execution ground in April 1554, he repented, only to break the conditions of his penance within two years and relapse into heretical behaviour again. Following a third trial in 1560, Sánchez was declared insane and sent to a mental hospital where inquisitors hoped he would be cured of his illness. This compelling tale, as well as redefining the image of the merciless inquisitor, invites us to look afresh at the dividing line between madness, heresy and ignorance and the relatively restrained role of the Inquisition in such cases.

Gabriel López from Galindos, near Ávila, was brought before the Toledan tribunal of the Inquisition in 1570 (aged 31) on a charge of heresy. His interrogation revealed that he was a man of Old Christian stock, baptised and confirmed, who regularly attended confession. He was able to recite the four prayers of the Church in both Latin and Castilian. He earned a living as a farm hand, beggar and prayer monger, frequently reciting a paraphrased version of the *Ave María* in exchange for money, in which he erroneously referred to Christ as "Three in One." Upon further questioning, it was discovered that, while he was able to correctly identify the three persons of the Trinity, he failed to understand the meaning of the word Trinity itself. Thus he could not distinguish between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. For Gabriel López (and presumably for all of those for whom he had recited the prayer), Christ was God. This confusion had a feminine counterpart: it was common for women, in their

excessive veneration of the Virgin, to identify her as the fourth member of the Trinity. Here was evidence of how unsatisfactorily certain aspects of Catholic doctrine were accommodated in the minds of the populace. Following a period of imprisonment, the unbeknown “heretic,” López, was forced to abjure his errors in an *auto de fe* held in the Plaza de Zocodover before returning to the community (Dedieu 1979, 258–261).

These examples of anti-orthodox behaviour reveal a considerable level of religious scepticism in Spanish society that prevailed despite official attempts at instruction and reform. The Counter-Reformation’s educative programme, conducted by the Catholic Church, clearly did not wholly satisfy the needs of the faithful, especially at the rural level, who struggled to understand and therefore adhere to Catholic teachings, preferring instead their popular forms of devotion centred on local saints, shrines and holy brotherhoods. The exposure of this fundamental weakness in the Church’s teaching mission prompted the measures adopted by the Spanish Inquisition to strengthen adherence to the faith via preventative rather than punitive means. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the corrective strategy adopted by the Inquisition meant that individuals themselves frequently became censors of their own behaviour (and that of others) for fear of the consequences, hence the number of cases of so-called ‘minor heresy’ coming before inquisitorial courts declined substantially.

The acceptance and rejection of the *Morisco*

The plight of the *Morisco* in sixteenth and seventeenth century Iberia – a problem particular to Spain and not Portugal where the Moors never settled – is one coloured by alternating policies of acceptance and rejection. Following the end of the Christian Reconquest of the peninsula, the Moslem community had been given the same ultimatum as the Jews in 1492: either convert to Christianity or leave Spain. Mass conversions took place, first in Castile from 1502 and a quarter of a century later in Aragon. In southern and eastern regions of the peninsula, most densely populated with *Moriscos*, the majority converted under duress. For much of the first half of the century, Granadine *Moriscos* retained intact their Moorish cultural identity, including their practice of Islamic rituals, in exchange for the payment of subsidies to the Crown and taxes to the local aristocracy, while their co-religionists in Valencia, continued to live as Moors and enjoyed similar immunity from inquisitorial prosecution. Little or no initiative was taken by the Church in these areas to instruct and integrate them into the Catholic faith, to which they remained superficially attached only. That situation changed dramatically from the 1560s, following the implementation of Tridentine reform on raising standards of adherence to Catholicism (Coleman 2003, 177–180). The Granadine *Moriscos* rose up in revolt against the enforced eradication of their cultural traditions and religious customs (1568–1570), while those in neighbouring Aragon were subject to increasing prosecution by the tribunals of Valencia and Zaragoza for their obstinate refusal to abandon their old faith. The age of cooperation between the two cultures in these regions now appeared to be over. However, modern evidence suggests that the picture was actually more balanced and that attempts at conciliation continued alongside demands for the outright expulsion of the *Moriscos* from Spain.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, there was no unanimous call to expel the *Moriscos*, either from within government, the *Cortés* or the Church. The Council of Inquisition was not formally consulted in the adoption of the final resolution. Divisions of opinion and of conscience continued to obstruct the decision-making process, just as they had done the attempted programme of integration. Those who favoured expulsion – men motivated by the political threat rather than the religious one – were actually in the minority. Ecclesiastical opinion in general did not support the harsh stand made by Archbishop Ribera of Valencia,

who in 1602 had called for the *Moriscos*' exclusion as "heretics and traitors." The bishop of Segorbe, Feliciano de Figueroa, reported in 1604, as he had done three years previously, of his success in bringing the faith to his *Morisco* flock via teaching and missionary work. Cardinal Fernando Niño de Guevara as Inquisitor General (1599–1602) refused to allow a global condemnation of the *Moriscos*. The same stance was taken by Philip III's favourite, the duke of Lerma. In his treatise of 1606, the chronicler Pedro de Valencia, as well as acknowledging the failings of the *Moriscos*, also put forward a series of rational solutions to solving the problem of their lack of integration. He strongly advised against the use of religion for political purposes. Instead he proposed that measures should be taken to incorporate the *Morisco* into Christian society on equal terms and to provide for their proper conversion and assimilation into the Catholic Church. Valencia's paper bore witness to the endurance of a tolerant, dispassionate current of thought in Spanish society, humanist in spirit, free from the prejudice and fanaticism that prevailed in certain circles on the eve of the expulsion:

In order to aid their conversion, the *Moriscos* must be compelled to abandon their Moorish dress and customs. But this must be done in a gentle rather than forceful way, without any intervention from the Holy Inquisition, for when they are subject to harsh tactics, they become rebellious and corrective measures, such as beatings and confiscations of goods, are interpreted as acts of vengeance by the enemy. As a result, they dig their heels in further [. . .] Not only should *Moriscos* be equal in status and honour to Old Christians, but everyone should now be called Old Christians without distinction.

(Jones 1997, 168–169)

When the formal decision to expel the *Moriscos* was taken by the Council of State on 4 April 1609 (and approved by Philip III five days later), it came as a shock to those working on the ground to find conciliatory solutions. The date was chosen to coincide with the signing of a twelve-year truce with Dutch rebels. A major propaganda exercise was mounted to divert public attention away from the humiliating withdrawal of troops from the Netherlands and focus instead on eradicating the enemy from within. The first expulsion order was published in Valencia on 22 September 1609. Five days later, Archbishop Ribera delivered a sermon in which he justified the banishment of the *Moriscos* on religious grounds. He referred to the dishonour suffered by true Christians by their forced coexistence with infidels and the need to placate God for having tolerated non-believers for so long. The old crusading militancy of the Spanish Church, rooted in the Reconquest, was thus dramatically rekindled in order to win over public support (Domínguez Ortiz and Vincent 1978, 177–180). According to government figures, within four months of the order, an estimated total of 135,000 *Moriscos* were deported from the kingdom of Valencia, suspected of being in collusion with their Ottoman allies. They were followed by their co-religionists from Castile, Extremadura, La Mancha, Andalusia, Murcia, Catalonia and Aragon. By the end of March 1611, the main part of the operation was complete, with pockets of resistance having been successfully crushed. The official calculation was that a total of nearly 300,000 *Moriscos* had been forced to leave Spain for France and North Africa, while some 10,000 to 12,000 others are thought to have lost their lives in rebellions en route to their places of departure (Lapeyre 1986, 252). By presenting the event as a great moral victory for Catholicism, the political calculations inherent in the dispersal were disguised, as were the conflict of attitudes within both lay and ecclesiastical circles that lay behind it. But modern scholars have found evidence to question the definitive nature of expulsion and the failure of attempts at integration. How far did the *Morisco* survive?

Some continually evaded prosecution such as Diego Díaz, a *Morisco* from Daimiel in New Castile, whose personal testimony delivered to inquisitors reveals important insights into his faith and endurance. In 1609 he was forced into exile along with other converts from Islam, but within two weeks he had returned to resume life in his homeland. It was eight to ten years before the civil authorities caught up with him and promptly deported him via the port of Cartagena. He arrived in Algiers where he was taken captive, forced to convert to Islam and circumcised against his will, but sought confession and continued to practice Christianity in secret. He managed to escape on a fishing boat and find his way back to Spain to begin a new life as a meat-cutter in Cuenca. Thirteen years later in 1632, he and his wife were arrested by the local tribunal of the Inquisition, accused of the secret practice of Moorish rituals. Díaz skilfully deployed various defensive strategies in his trial. He successfully guessed the identity of those who had denounced him, therefore eliminating their charges. He also maintained that it was possible to be a *Morisco* and a faithful Christian at the same time, thus counteracting the accusation of heresy. He was eventually let off with a reprimand (Kagan and Dyer 2004, 119–151).

The *Morisco* community that inhabited the village of Villarubia de los Ojos in the region of Campo de Calatrava in La Mancha may be considered another exception to the rule, as illustrated by Dadson's research (2007). They had voluntarily been baptised as Catholics prior to the implementation of forced conversions in 1502 and, significantly, in this same year were granted equal status to their Old Christian neighbours by Ferdinand and Isabella. During the first half of the sixteenth century they gradually became assimilated into Christian society with little or no need for inquisitorial intervention, constituting a growing and economically significant minority of farmers, workers and labourers. From 1550 they had risen to assume middle-class positions in society such as town councillor and magistrate and were playing an active role in civic life. Fellow Old Christian villagers, together with their overlord the Count of Salinas, supported them in their struggle against the edict of expulsion, served upon them in the summer of 1611. They returned from forced exile to France and then resisted two further attempts to banish them in 1612 and 1613, insisting on their right to remain in their homeland. They resumed their role in the local community and in 1627 the ancient status of the *Moriscos* of Campo del Calatrava, granted 125 years earlier, was reconfirmed by royal decree.

In October 1611 Philip III signed an expulsion order on all the 2,500 inhabitants of the community of the Valle del Ricote in Murcia. Many appealed against this decision, including Fray Juan de Pereda (emissary of the royal confessor), who wrote an account in April 1612 of the different sorts of *Moriscos* who lived in the kingdom, insisting on the Christianity of those of the Valle del Ricote:

And it is rare to find a witness that does not confirm that none dresses in Moorish fashion, that they usually drink wine and the majority eats bacon. In this they differ greatly from the *moriscos* of Granada and Valencia. [. . .] The difference is also manifest in their language, for those who are above 40 do not speak Arabic nor do they understand it. Lastly, all witnesses confirm that in all things pertaining to Christianity the *moriscos* [of the Valle del Ricote] are like saints compared to their compatriots in Granada, Valencia and Aragón. [. . .] Those people who speak most earnestly about the sincerity of their faith are confessors and those who have had individual contact with them.
(Lapeyre, Appendix xvi)

But hardliners on the Council of State refused to be convinced by Pereda's appeal, alleging the inhabitants of the Valle del Ricote to be nothing but superficial Christians. Some, they claimed, had joined religious orders and feigned conversion to avoid enforced exile. The

expulsion went ahead in October 1613 and a total of 6,000 to 7,000 *Moriscos* were forced out of their Murcian homeland. However, such was their devotion to their roots that many returned illegally from exile. Although subjected to punishment they continued to defy the secular authorities who gave up their chase in 1626 and allowed them to settle once again in *their* kingdom. Via the character of Ricote – drawn from historical reality – who appears in Part II of *Don Quijote* (1615), Cervantes expressed his own underlying sympathy (and possibly that of a wider public) for the banished *Morisco* by making him the mouthpiece of the sadness and bitterness of a condemned community and race. “To us,” claimed Ricote, “it [exile] was the most terrible [punishment] that could be inflicted. Wherever we are we weep for Spain; for, after all, we were born here and this is our native country. Nowhere do we find the reception our misery requires,” he lamented (*Don Quijote*, Part II, Chapter 53).

These stories of *Morisco* survival against the odds reveal an endurance of their influence and that of the old spirit of *convivencia* beyond expulsion that may have been much more widespread than the official propaganda would suggest. Along with sections of the religious community, the Spanish Inquisition, despite its outward alignment with the political agenda, remained open to conciliation with its *Morisco* neighbours.

The inclusion and exclusion of the Portuguese *converso*

The brutal persecution of crypto-Judaism has long remained synonymous with the activity of the Iberian Inquisitions. This generalisation needs qualifying in terms of time, geography and prevailing attitudes. Most historians agree that the primary religious motivation for the establishment of the Holy Office – to purify the peninsula of deceitful Christians who might threaten the stability of the Catholic state – was underscored by racial prejudice against the Jewish community and resentment at their socio-economic success. There is certainly widely documented evidence to support the severity with which the Castilian branch of the Inquisition dealt with its backsliding Jews, as well as those who practised two faiths simultaneously over the period 1480–1525, when it burned approximately 2,000 victims. Thereafter the incidence of crypto-Judaism declined substantially in Castile, while it had only a negligible impact in neighbouring Aragon where the Jewish community had never settled in large numbers. Meanwhile, a much more lenient policy towards converted Jews operated in Portugal. The *cristãos-novos* community included a considerable number of Spanish exiles who had left their homeland after the 1492 expulsion order. Although forced to convert within five years of their arrival, they enjoyed almost half a century of freedom from persecution in their adopted country, allowing them to maintain sophisticated links with Judaism. They became known as ‘Men of the [Jewish] Nation’ on account of their adherence to their Jewish faith and identity (Bodian 1994, 58–60). The Portuguese Inquisition was not fully operational until 1547, but during the first 33 years of its existence only around 2,000 New Christians were brought to trial by its tribunals – a relatively small number compared with the size of the problem they posed. Although rooted out for their Judaic practices and stigmatised for their race, they were also highly valued as bankers, merchants and traders. Their strategy of part-conformity and part-dissimulation in matters of the faith allowed Portuguese *conversos* to maintain sophisticated links with Judaism, as well as the opportunity for their commercial activities to prosper. But their long period of relative exemption from inquisitorial scrutiny was soon to come to an end.

The Portuguese Inquisition suddenly became a much more repressive instrument of racial and religious control following the annexation of Portugal to Spain in 1580. Fifty autos were held in Lisbon, Evora and Coimbra between 1581 and 1600 at which 3,000 were penanced and 212 were condemned to death. This forced the Portuguese New Christian community to seek

alternative ways of preserving their ethnic identity and deploying their professional skills. Several thousand opted for migration to Castile, settling in commercial cities such as Madrid, Seville and Málaga, hoping for greater clemency from the Spanish Inquisition as opposed to that in their homeland. In practice, they found themselves subject to fluctuating strategies of inclusion and exclusion. In August 1605 a papal brief was issued which allowed more than 400 Portuguese New Christians, referred to as *portugueses de la nación judía*, to be released from inquisitorial custody in Portugal and enjoy immunity from prosecution for a limited period in return for a 1.86 million-ducat payment to Philip III. From 1607 through 1611 no *conversos* came before the courts of the Spanish Inquisition, but once the terms of the pardon had expired, those crypto-Jews who had enjoyed a temporary safe haven in Spain soon found the pressure stepped up against them.

Against this backdrop, a fierce debate was taking place within lay and ecclesiastical circles over the continued justification for the purity of blood laws that had prevented *conversos* from holding public office since 1449. The *limpieza* statutes were regarded by many as unfairly discriminating against *conversos* whose family connections with Judaism in Spain were so remote as to be indiscernible, yet who continued to be treated as suspect Jews and barred from advancement in the professions (Kamen 1997, 248–254; Rawlings 2002, 139–142). Where Portuguese New Christians were concerned, however, their Jewish ancestry was more recent and therefore the test of *limpieza* could be applied with greater certainty. In 1619, Martín González de Cellorigo, an employee of the Inquisition of Toledo, wrote a *Plea for justice from your Majesty on behalf of certain individuals from the kingdom of Portugal*. He argued for toleration to be shown towards Portuguese New Christians, less on religious than on financial grounds: the harnessing of their commercial expertise which was vital to the interests of the Spanish economy (Alpert 2001, 42–45). The first minister of Philip IV, the Count-Duke Olivares, spearheaded the modification of the *limpieza de sangre* laws, in which he had a particular interest through his own line of *converso* descent. He made his views known on the victimisation of the converted Jew in a discussion at the Council of State in 1625 at which he described the statutes as being ‘unjust and impious, against divine law, natural law, and the law of nations. [. . .] In no other government or state in the world do such laws exist’ (Lynch 1992, 148).

The financial crisis faced by Philip IV at the beginning of his reign forced him to give serious consideration to making use, as his father had done, of the entrepreneurial skills and capital of Portuguese New Christians, many of whom had fled from Spain under the renewed round of persecutions. Between 1626 and 1627, on the instruction of the Crown, the Spanish Inquisition issued Portuguese financiers suspected of Judaic practices with another temporary pardon for past offences and allowed them to compete for financial contracts (*asientos*) with Italian bankers. The following year they were granted free access to trade anywhere within the Spanish Empire. By the middle of the reign of Philip IV they were negotiating more than half of the loans required by the treasury to finance its debt payments and support Spain’s vast military effort overseas. In return for bribes and payments, the Crown was able to make use of their highly valued financial and entrepreneurial expertise to rescue its ailing economy. In the case of Portuguese New Christians, therefore, it can be argued that political and economic considerations frequently took precedence over those of maintaining orthodoxy, but this situation only endured while it suited the expediency of the monarch. The protection offered to the Portuguese New Christians, now acting as royal bankers, was a major source of scandal. In particular it raised the concerns of traditionalists within the Church who saw religious ideals being discarded to meet the financial needs of a bankrupt government and exposed the underlying racial sympathies of Olivares, who drew up a radical proposal in 1634 to allow exiled

Jews to be able to return to Spain. The Spanish Inquisition never reconciled itself to the new deal for Portuguese *conversos* and maintained its vigilance over them despite government restraint and Philip IV's intervention to protect them (Lynch, 148–149).

In 1640 Portugal re-asserted its independence from the Spanish Monarchy. The Inquisition seized the opportunity to renew its zealous purge of the minority of Portuguese New Christians left in Spain – now its political adversaries – while also impressing its indispensability on the Crown as the 200-year-old protector of the nation's orthodoxy. Leading Portuguese financiers who had previously served the Crown became the target of attack. Whole families were reportedly arrested in Madrid (often on the basis of false testimony) and many took flight. Just over 60% of all trials conducted by the tribunal of Cuenca between 1650 and 1670 – where many of the cases denounced in Madrid were processed – were for the secret practice of Judaism. In Toledo the peak decade for the trial of crypto-Jews was 1651 to 1660 when they accounted for 76.5% of all cases (Alpert 2001, 91–92). By 1680, the rigorous pursuit of Portuguese New Christians had reached its climax. On 30 June of that year a grandiose *auto de fe* (depicted by the artist Francisco Rizi) was held in Madrid at which 56 judaisers were 'reconciled' or severely punished and 22 sentenced to death by burning, the majority of Portuguese origin. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese New Christian community in Spain had effectively been wiped out, although *conversos* continued to make up the majority who came before the courts of the Spanish Inquisition up to 1730. The alternating policy of persecution and accommodation adopted by Iberian governments towards Portuguese New Christians, based on economic imperatives, emphasises the way in which the Inquisition was forced to yield to secular priorities at the expense of the eradication of Jewish heresy.

Conclusion

The different case studies examined here lead us to reconsider the theory and practice of Iberian inquisitorial authority in matters of orthodoxy. The historical evidence suggests that the need to strengthen Spain's leadership of the Counter-Reformation lay behind the Spanish Inquisition's corrective policy towards Old Christian deviance from the faith. A re-examination of the decision to expel the *Moriscos* from Spain reveals a fundamental political motivation that did not necessarily converge with the will of the religious or inquisitorial authorities who favoured a more conciliatory approach. The plight of the Portuguese *conversos* can be seen as intrinsically linked to the value of their commercial and financial expertise to the economic survival of the state. As a result of this policy, crypto-Judaism was allowed to survive much longer than the Inquisition in either Spain or Portugal might have wished, hence the heavy-handed approach of Spanish tribunals when the *converso* finally fell from royal favour. We can conclude by proposing that the Iberian Inquisitions were not always the arbiters of their own actions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but rather responsive to different circumstances and policy decisions – at times coercive, at other times more measured – allowing us to redraw the balance between the institution's authoritarian reputation and its often acquiescent disposition.

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