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### The Faiths of Abraham in Medieval Iberia

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## 4

THE FAITHS OF ABRAHAM IN  
MEDIEVAL IBERIA*John Edwards*

Both in academic work and in the general perception fostered, for example, by the tour guides of Córdoba's Mezquita-Catedral, medieval Spain came to be regarded, in late twentieth-century historiography, as the scene of a remarkable and generally peaceful co-existence (*convivencia*) between adherents of the three religious faiths of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Yet in reality the religious history of "the Spains," including Portugal, in the medieval period contained all the contradictions and conflicts which had arisen from the development of the newer faiths, Christianity and Islam, out of Judaism. In the medieval period, in the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere, none of these religions truly accepted the validity of the others, and although those which possessed political and military power, the Christians and the Muslims, were not always at war, the latent conflict between them was always there to be revived and exploited at any opportune moment. The Iberian Jewish communities, having no political power, were always liable to be exploited and, especially between 1200 and 1500, became a target for attack, particularly in the areas of the Peninsula ruled by Christian princes.

At the time of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and the beginnings of the Christian Church, in the first century CE, Jews were already living in the Roman provinces of Hispania, including the future kingdom of Portugal. It is not entirely clear when the followers of Jesus's "Way," the Christians, began to appear in the Iberian Peninsula, but the fifth-century successor state, ruled by the Germanic Visigoths, was explicitly Christian, though of the Arian persuasion which was eventually condemned as heretical by the "Catholics." Before the Muslim raid across the Straits of Gibraltar in 711, which became an invasion and then a conquest, Iberia's Jewish communities came under ever-increasing pressure to convert to Christianity. It was in this period that much of the Church's teaching, in the form either of papal pronouncements or of the decrees of ecclesiastical councils, put ever-greater pressure on Jews who refused to convert. They were increasingly placed under penal restrictions, and efforts were made to segregate them, geographically and socially, from their Christian neighbours. Although the assertion that Jews welcomed and even militarily assisted the Muslim invasion, which continued to be implicitly believed by most Christian Spaniards and Portuguese in the later Middle Ages and onwards, seems to be false, it is undeniable that pressure on Jews was at least initially reduced in the areas of the Peninsula which were thereafter controlled by Muslims.

Recent historiography has led to an interpretation of Christian-Muslim relations, between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries, that modifies and refines the old account, which simply

identified the underlying process in that period as a Christian reconquest (*Reconquista*) of the land that had been “lost” to Islam after 711. Firstly, it now seems clear that the process whereby the existing, largely Christian, population of Iberia, an ethnically diverse mixture of Hispano-Roman and Visigothic German, converted in significant numbers to Islam was slow, erratic and still incomplete by the time of the break-up (*fitna*) of the Caliphate of Córdoba after 1031 (Kennedy 1996, 1–129). Some territories in the far north of the Peninsula, particularly Galicia, Asturias, the Basque country and parts of Catalonia, had never submitted religiously, and, between the eighth and the tenth centuries, these statelets, which would eventually become the medieval Christian kingdoms of León, Castile and Portugal, as well as the principality of Catalunya, launched the earliest of the intermittent military advances southwards, which would eventually lead Isabel and Fernando, the *Reyes Católicos*, to launch a final and successful war of conquest (1482–1492) in what had by then become the Nasrid emirate of Granada. It would be wrong, at least up until that final phase, which indeed might accurately be described as a *Reconquista*, to see the many political and military conflicts which unfolded in the Peninsula as “religious” wars. Although frontier conflicts in the Peninsula, between Muslim and Christian entities, came to be qualified on the Christian side as “crusades” at least until the thirteenth century – and were recognised as such by the Papacy, with the corresponding tax-benefits (the *cruzada*) – they often saw Muslims and Christians fighting on the same side. The epic career of Ruy Díaz de Bivar, “El Cid,” symbolises a type of conflict that was neither Christian crusade nor Muslim *jihād* (Michael 1978).

This is not to say that there were no religious and ideological elements in the relations between the Abrahamic faiths in medieval Iberia. Practical co-existence did not mean anything resembling modern notions of tolerance, as a positively relativist concept. The best that could be hoped for was *de facto* toleration. There were always voices among Christians and Muslims who advocated conversion, often by violence, and Jews were liable to fall prey to the more severe teachings of both the rival faiths, without the possibility of political or military response. The more extreme measures of the Visigoths, which fell into abeyance as a result of the arrival of Muslim rule in the Peninsula, began to be revived in the thirteenth century. By 1200, the Christian kingdom of Portugal had become established, but much of the southern third of the Spanish part of the Peninsula, including Andalusia, remained under the rule of fragmented Muslim states (*taifas*). Up until that point, Christian rulers, in both Spain and Portugal, had advanced irregularly southwards, on more or less parallel fronts and, from 1085, with papal backing as “crusaders.” The balance of power between Christian rulers inevitably affected the lives of those who lived on either side of the “frontier.” As long as Christians and Muslims were as likely to fight with as against each other, no major territorial advances were to be expected, but in 1212 the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa changed all that. There, Alfonso VIII of Castile, with the help of the Aragonese and Catalans, defeated the Muslim army and opened the gateway to Andalusia. Even then, the traditional pattern repeated itself, and there was no further military advance for more than twenty years. The battle of Las Navas had demonstrated the potential of united force, but the next steps forward were taken separately, by Ferdinand III of Castile and James I of Aragon (Kennedy 1996, 130–272).

The conquest of Córdoba, the former caliphal capital, in 1236, took place more or less by accident. In the Sierra Morena and the Pedroche, to the north of the city, nominally Christian bandits, known as *almogávares*, were making a good living out of the traffic between the Guadalquivir valley and the plains of the central Meseta. In the spring of that year, some of them came down to settle a dispute and discovered the eastern segment of the city, the Ajerquía, undefended. They entered, seized the city, and sent word to King Ferdinand, who later arrived with an army, and gradually incorporated the “kingdom of Córdoba” into the Crown of Castile.

A similar pattern, but with more direct royal involvement, was followed in Seville (1248) and Jaén (1252): only the kingdom, or emirate, of Granada remained in Muslim hands. As far as the religious settlement of western Andalusia was concerned, by the 1260s, the pattern of inter-faith relations in Castilian territory, including Murcia, was largely settled, as it would remain until the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Although Muslims and Jews were initially offered religious freedom, subordinated to Christian political and ecclesiastical structures, most urban Muslims quickly departed, either to Granada or to North Africa. In the countryside, Muslims continued to cultivate land that had now been divided, in *repartimientos*, among Christian nobles and churchmen, but, after a major uprising in Andalusia in 1264, most of this rural population departed or was removed as well. Thus the relatively few remaining Jews and Muslims, the latter known as *mudéjares*, mostly lived, under religious and social restriction, in the towns. In parallel to the Castilian enterprise in western Andalusia, the Crown of Aragon expanded, with the capture and resettlement, during the 1230s, of what became the kingdom of Valencia. Here, although, as in Andalusia, most Muslims, including the religious authorities, left the towns; a large *mudéjar* population survived in the countryside, as did Jewish communities in the towns of Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia. A similar situation prevailed in the separate kingdoms of Portugal and Navarre.

Relations among adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths, in the period between the 1260s and the accession of Isabel I of Castile in 1474, and her husband Ferdinand of Aragon five years later, have traditionally been studied and assessed, not only with the inevitable historical hindsight, but also in the light of what happened after the establishment of the new Spanish Inquisition (1478–1480) and the conquest of Granada in 1492. Thus there is still a strong tendency to see the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in particular, as a time of steady deterioration in interfaith relations. Increasingly, however, scholars are adding nuances to the picture. Iberian rulers, after 1250, inherited a body of Christian teaching, on relations with other faiths, which had very largely been developed to deal with those Jews who refused to abandon their traditional religion. This meant that royal legislation, notably Alfonso X of Castile's seven-part code (*Siete Partidas*), even though it was not put into full effect until 1348, embodied all the restrictions on Jewish life that popes and Church councils demanded (Carpenter 1986). Although, in the period 1250 to 1450, parallel measures were increasingly adopted by the Peninsular kingdoms to control their remaining *mudéjares*, official thinking on Islam very much followed the restrictive approach that had traditionally been adopted towards Jews. Elsewhere in Europe, what became known as the "First Crusade" to Palestine (1095–1099) had unleashed violence against Europe's Jews, as well as the Muslim rulers of the Christian holy places in the "Holy Land" itself. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries produced not only further violence against Jews, for example in Germany, France and England, but also saw the evolution of Christian "tales" about Jews. Now, they appeared not only as killers and deniers of Jesus Christ, but also as crucifiers of Christian children, who even, in some versions, used their victims' blood to make unleavened bread (*matzos*) for Passover.

Alfonso X's *Partidas* do not explicitly endorse these accusations (to Jews "blood libels"), but they nevertheless re-affirm the old accusations of Christ-killing, and urge the segregation of Jewish communities (*aljamas*) from the Christian majority population. In succeeding reigns in Castile, and with parallels in the Crown of Aragon, while many of these restrictive measures were not enforced, Jews, and in some cases Muslims too, came under a new form of attack. In Iberia, as elsewhere in Western Europe, the period 1250 to 1350 saw a significant expansion of population and strong economic development. Towns grew in size and importance, and increasingly used their representation, by *procuradores* in the various parliaments (*Cortes/Corts*) of the kingdoms, to assert the interests of leading citizens (*caballeros, omes buenos*)

against the nobility (*ricos omes*, *hidalgos*), by influencing the Crown. In this process, which lasted from the late 1280s to the 1340s, taxation became a major issue. Successive Castilian *Cortes* urged kings (Sancho IV, Ferdinand IV, Alfonso XI) to end the farming of royal taxes altogether, and ban nobles, clergy and Jews (in some cases Muslims also) from collecting these taxes (*pechos*) on the Crown's behalf, or acting as tax inspectors. Meanwhile, other Iberian rulers continued to honour, at least in name, the precepts of the Church on Jewish-Christian relations.

The major plague which ravaged much of Europe between 1348 and 1351, and is commonly known as the "Black Death," reached the Iberian Peninsula, through Catalonia and Valencia, in 1349. In March 1350, it killed Alfonso XI of Castile, while he was besieging Gibraltar, thus bringing Pedro I to the throne. His reign, which lasted until 1369, was full of conflict, some of which highlighted the Jewish and Muslim minorities, in the context of war between Castile and Aragon, civil war within Castile itself, and involvement in the long military struggle between France and England, known as the "Hundred Years' War." Pedro's main opponent, his bastard half-brother Enrique, count of Trastámara, not only used as a propaganda weapon the King's supposed favouring of Jews and Muslims, including the emir of Granada, at the expense of Christians and their religion, but also incited violent attacks on Jewish *aljamas*, beginning in Toledo in May 1355. There is no substantial evidence that Pedro in fact pursued policies favouring Jews and Muslims, but, when Enrique seized the throne, by murdering his opponent, he, and the succeeding Trastamarian dynasty, up to Ferdinand and Isabel, faced the same issues as previous Castilian rulers, as well as their Iberian neighbours.

It seems undeniable that social pressure on religious minorities, especially in Spain rather than Portugal, was increasing fairly steadily between 1350 and 1390. This happened even though there is little evidence that Jews were blamed for spreading the "great plague," either in its initial onslaught or in the recurring epidemics which continued well into the fifteenth century. This formed a contrast with events elsewhere in Europe, particularly Germany and France, where many Jews were killed for this supposed reason, or else forced to convert to Christianity. Nevertheless, secular pressure, especially in the larger towns of the Peninsula, remained on rulers, both to enforce the restrictions on Jewish, and to some extent Muslim, life which were enjoined by the Church, and to remove both minorities, especially Jews, from the farming and collection of royal taxes. There was, however, little sign, by 1390, that royal policy was going to change. Jews were so essential to the functioning of the royal administration, particularly in Castile, that there seemed to be no possibility of removing them from the royal service. All this would change with the outbreak of murderous violence against Jews in Seville in June 1391.

Although there had been previous incidents of violence against Jews, some involving forced conversion to Christianity, as well as theft, arson and murder, the events of 1391, involving Spain but not Portugal, were of a different order. While it has been argued that converts, in Castile at least, had been undermining the morale of Jewish communities ever since the civil war of 1366–1369, the scale of the violence from June to August 1391 was unprecedented (Netanyahu 2001, 129–167). It spread from Seville, across Andalusia, then New and Old Castile, and also into Aragon and Catalonia, leading to many deaths, much destruction of property, and a large number of conversions, in that year and subsequently. Thus a new situation was created in Spain, with whole families and groups, instead of individuals, as had been traditional, having access to crucial parts of the majority Christian society, including local governmental offices, the Church, the universities, the professions and guilds. The *converso* phenomenon was thus created, which would affect the history of Spain and, from 1497 onwards, that of Portugal, well into the modern era.

The Christian Church which the Jewish converts joined, between 1390 and about 1420, had developed as part of Western Catholic Christendom, since the conversion of the Visigothic monarchs from the “heresy” of Arianism (an alternative interpretation of the Holy Trinity), in the sixth century. Thanks to the unique history of the Iberian Peninsula, in the context of Western Europe, the late medieval Spanish and Portuguese Church, while organised on lines similar to those of its European neighbours, into dioceses and provinces headed by bishops, and with a parochial structure which covered all areas under Christian rule, had a special role in confronting not only a Jewish minority but also Islam. Against this background, after 1391, the Spanish Church faced two urgent problems, one at home but the other abroad. Firstly, the conversion of tens of thousands of Jews presented the Church with a practical, pastoral problem which had not faced European Church hierarchies since the conversion of the pagan Balts in the thirteenth century. The situation required a systematic programme of instruction in Christian doctrine, not at the level of debate among professional Christian and Jewish scholars but in the context of ordinary Jews who now found themselves in a new religious environment which was at the same time familiar and strange. The second problem was imposed on all Western European Churches by the “Great Schism,” the split between rival popes, one in Rome and the other in Avignon, which would rack the Catholic Church between 1378 and 1417. While their colleagues at home proved singularly unsuccessful at integrating the new *converso* population into the established Church, some Spanish churchmen, ironically including some *conversos*, made important contributions to the restoration of a united Roman Papacy, which would have a long future.

The nature of the religious conversion which was experienced by Jews in Spain around 1400, and later in Portugal, has been the subject of an immense amount of controversy ever since. This is not only because of its uniqueness but also because of the shattering events which followed it. In Spain, a significant social movement began in the 1420s, in which it appeared that all the social pressures that had been placed on Jews, in earlier centuries, were transferred to the *conversos*. The converts were accused, fundamentally, of not having made a genuine and complete conversion. In a sense, this appeared even worse than their previous “obstinate” clinging to their Jewish faith. They were now increasingly seen, once many of them began to achieve prominence in mainstream society, as “the enemy within,” and thus even more dangerous than they had been before.

Converts from Judaism to Christianity had traditionally been subject to suspicion among those who had always been part of the Christian Church, known in Castilian-speaking Spain as “Old Christians” (*cristianos viejos*). Elsewhere in Europe, in the thirteenth century, for example in England, Dominican friars operated “houses of converts,” in which the former Jews were indoctrinated in the Christian faith and kept separate from their former co-religionaries, in case they returned to their former religion. Thus, by the mid-fifteenth century, many *cristianos viejos* in Spain, seeing the *conversos* retaining their links with their Jewish relatives and communities, began to assume that they were still really Jews, and had not truly become “new people” when they received the Christian sacrament of baptism, having instead been guilty of the treachery that was traditionally believed to be characteristic of Jews in general. One of the most distinguished historians of Spanish Jewry, Benzion Netanyahu, powerfully maintained an alternative view, in which the accusations of crypto-Judaism among the *conversos* existed largely, if not entirely, in the highly prejudiced minds of the *cristianos viejos*. For him, the converts and their descendants were sincere Christians, and from this proposition he concluded that the “remedy” for this “problem,” proposed and then implemented in Spain from about 1450 onwards, the Inquisition, was predicated on a false perception.

In the Middle Ages, an “inquisition” was a set form of legal inquiry, aimed at arriving at the truth about a particular matter, such as a crime, or the ownership of property. Since the

early thirteenth century, this procedure, which derived from Roman law, had been employed in the Catholic Church as a means of identifying incorrect Christian belief and practice. Pope Gregory IX first authorised specialised tribunals, mainly consisting of Dominican friars, to investigate heresy in northern Italy and southern France, and the French activity soon spread into Catalonia. At this stage, the main targets were Christian groups, the Cathars (“Perfect Ones”) and Waldensians, who had been declared unorthodox by the Papacy. However, the Catalan and Aragonese inquisitors, based in Barcelona, Valencia and Zaragoza, quickly drew Jews into their net, although non-Christians, such as Jews and Muslims, were not subject to their tribunals’ direct jurisdiction. But in the new circumstances of fifteenth-century Castile, where, as in Portugal and Navarre, the earlier tribunals had never functioned, the *conversos*, and therefore Jews, became the primary target (Edwards 2009, 31–84).

The religious identity of the thousands of Jews who converted to Christianity between 1390 and about 1420 remains a deeply controversial subject. The ways in which their beliefs and practices are characterised reveal much of the views and methodologies of the scholars who attempt to analyse them. The approach of the Church to Judaism, set out in the correspondence of popes and in the decrees of Councils, and reflected in secular legislation, in Iberia as elsewhere, was extremely negative. Christianity arose controversially out of Judaism, and left a bitter legacy. On the basis of some texts which came to be included in the official “canon” of the New Testament, the Jews’ religion was generally portrayed as hard and legalistic, in contrast to the spiritual freedom which following Christ claimed to offer. In particular, on the basis of a text in Matthew’s gospel, Christians came to blame Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus, not only those present at his trials before their own high priests and Pontius Pilate, but all their descendants forever. This belief would, of course, prove highly dangerous to medieval Jews, in Spain and Portugal as well as elsewhere. The conversions around the year 1400 added a new dimension to this ancient anti-Jewish feeling. Because of the violent circumstances in which these baptisms happened, not only in the midst of the 1391 pogroms but also in subsequent years, it could easily be supposed, and often was, that the sacrament was frequently received insincerely, and therefore did not achieve its proper result, by turning the convert into a new person, who had completely abandoned the old, “wicked” religion.

Both the pressure to convert, and suspicion of the sincerity of the conversion, affected all the Spanish Christian kingdoms, though not Portugal, in the first half of the fifteenth century. However, it was in the Crown of Castile that the demand for a new Inquisition developed, while the existing inquisitorial tribunals in Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia, which had originally been set up to deal with “Old” Christian heretics rather than converted Jews, continued to operate on a limited scale. Like the Jews in the fourteenth century, the *conversos* now found themselves being tossed about in the conflicts and confusion of Spanish politics, as kings and aristocracies vied for power, in both Castile and Aragon. It was one such conflict, involving Juan II of Castile and his favourite (*privado*), Don Álvaro de Luna, on one side, and groups of nobles and townsmen on the other, which led to demands for the exclusion from public life of all *conversos*, on the grounds that they were as dangerous to society as Jews. In 1449, a *converso* tax collector in Toledo, Alonso de Cota, was violently attacked and, rather on the model of 1391, the trouble developed into a general assault on the city’s *conversos*. Although the king’s peace was eventually restored, in the meantime a lawyer working for the city council (*concejo*), Bachiller Marcos, produced a memorandum in which he argued that, because of their innate insincerity and wickedness, converts from Judaism should never be allowed to hold public office in Toledo again. Although the converts were restored (ironically, Jews had temporarily taken over their role in farming and collecting the municipal rents), the issue would not go away, and successive kings and their officials, especially in Castile, were

bombarded with demands for a new Inquisition, which would be aimed at establishing whether the *conversos* were in fact sincere Catholic Christians or secret Jews.

Some churchmen took up the cause, the most notable among them being a Franciscan friar, Alonso de Espina who, in his treatise,  *Fortalitium fidei*  (“Fortress of the Faith”) used the anti-Jewish lore of the medieval Church to urge first Juan II and then Enrique IV of Castile to ask the pope for a new Inquisition in Castile. Between 1450 and the accession of Isabel I, in December 1474, Castilian politics were in turmoil, with aristocratic factions fighting for control of the Crown, and many major towns were divided, sometimes militarily, between rival groups. The *conversos*, who were often, by then, the children, or even grandchildren, of those who had actually started their lives as Jews, and then been baptised as Christians, often became the identity mark which defined one seigniorial faction against another. In Córdoba, for instance, where control was being fought over, in the 1460s and 1470s, between two branches of the Fernández de Córdoba family, the Aguilar branch tended to favour *conversos*, whereas the Cabra branch aimed to reduce their influence. In 1473, a major riot broke out in Córdoba, in which *conversos* were attacked, their property was stolen, and some died. Ironically, the city’s remaining Jews were not targeted on this occasion, but there, as elsewhere in Andalusia especially, disorder increased, and continued during the first five years of Isabel’s reign, with her husband, Fernando of Aragon.

The civil war that broke out in Castile after Isabel’s succession, together with an unsuccessful Portuguese invasion on behalf of the rival candidate for the throne, Juana, nicknamed “La Beltraneja,” delayed the new queen’s programme for strengthening royal authority. Only at the *Cortes* of Toledo, in 1480, was this wide-ranging attempt at reform published and given legal force, but the *converso* question had by then been tackled in a new and significant way. Isabel, in particular, seems to have accepted the argument that the Inquisition was needed in her kingdoms to test the orthodoxy of the converts from Judaism, and she and her husband, Fernando, petitioned Pope Sixtus IV to authorise such a tribunal. He did so on 1 November 1478, and two years later inquisitors began work in Seville. Within five years, other tribunals had begun work in Córdoba and Ciudad Real, the latter soon moving to Toledo. At the same time, Fernando introduced the “new” Inquisition to his Aragonese and Catalan territories, removing and replacing the remaining inquisitors under the original, thirteenth-century foundation (Edwards 2000, 80–99).

It is the work of these tribunals of the “Spanish Inquisition,” lasting until the 1830s, which has given the Spanish kingdoms, in particular, a reputation for religious fanaticism and oppression. Although they are far from complete, the surviving archives of the Inquisition (to which the Portuguese Inquisition was added in the sixteenth century) have led scholars to debate the motivation, as well as the methods, of the inquisitors. Until the end of the fifteenth century, the target of the Inquisition was surviving Judaism among the *conversos*, though, after 1492, Muslims were subjected to similar pressures, once the emirate of Granada had been conquered by Isabel and Fernando’s armies. There was nothing new in the methodology of the Spanish inquisitors. They retained the traditional view of Jews as hereditary “Christ-killers,” who were damned unless they converted, and whose religion, the “Law of Moses,” was legalistic, cruel and fundamentally wrong. The surviving trials from Isabel’s reign, that is, up to 1504, reveal an approach to the religion of the *conversos* which was equally legalistic. During the 1480s, inquisitors came to believe that they had discovered whole networks of “judaizing” converts (“New Christians”), and this led them to argue that the continuing existence of unconverted Jews in the Spanish kingdoms was preventing the full assimilation of the *conversos* into the Church. Finally, in 1492, in the wake of the conquest of Granada, and shortly before Christopher Columbus was dispatched on his first voyage across the Atlantic, the King and Queen



agreed to issue parallel edicts, for Castile and Aragon respectively, whereby Jews were ordered to convert to Christianity in three months, or else leave Spain with only what they could carry. Some converted, a few first left the country and then returned to become Christians, but most, tens of thousands, abandoned Spain for good, going to Portugal (where conversion would be imposed in 1497), North Africa, the Turkish Ottoman empire, and even Rome itself (Edwards 2000, 228–235). The loss of so many industrious Jews inevitably had a negative effect on Spain itself. Yet possibly even more influential, in what would come to be known as Spain’s “Golden Age” (*Siglo de Oro*), were the *conversos* and their descendants. Despite the continuing work of the Inquisition, and the ever-growing obsession of Spaniards with genealogy, and “pure” blood, supposedly free of Jewish, Muslim or heretical Christian constituents, in the modern age, Spanish Christianity, and increasingly that of Portugal as well, together with both countries’ overseas possessions, continued to show unmistakable signs of influence from these two other faiths of Abraham (Edwards 1996, article VII).

One other vital question needs to be asked about the complex religious history of the Iberian Peninsula in the late Middle Ages. It is basic, and yet often forgotten in the very proper anxiety to get to the real reasons for the inability of the Christian majority, by the time of Isabel and Fernando, to tolerate any longer their Jewish and Muslim neighbours. The question is: What did religion mean to medieval Iberians? On the basis of the documentary sources which are the staple diet of historians, and which tend to be unquestioningly accepted by literary scholars too, “religions” or “faiths” – in the case of Iberia Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are assumed to have consisted of definitions and precepts issued by religious leaders – pope, bishops, imams, rabbis – and reinforced by secular rulers, who also assumed divine authority for themselves. Thus even before the reign of Isabel and Fernando, with its introduction of a new Inquisition to Castile and Aragon, Iberian Christian rulers generally accepted the Church’s definition of what should be regarded as correct doctrine, “orthodoxy,” and what should be regarded as incorrect or false teaching, “heresy.” Such thinking appears to presuppose that “religion” consists of a set of intellectual propositions, which may be assented to or disagreed with, yet much of the surviving evidence for the actual lives of medieval Iberians, of all social classes, suggests a much more practical and down-to-earth approach. The late medieval and early modern Inquisitions in fact combined the intellectual with the practical method. Christian assumptions about the “unspiritual” legalism and ritualism of Judaism, and to a lesser extent Islam, led inquisitors, according to the remaining trial evidence, to spend far more time quizzing suspected “heretics” about details of their domestic lives than about theology. Thus *conversos* were asked if they had a clean tablecloth for the Friday evening meal, as they would have done as Jews for Shabbat, and converted Muslims (*Moriscos*), from the early sixteenth century onwards, were asked about their bathing habits, in case they were still bathing ritually, as they had done before their Islamic prayers (Edwards 1996, article I). In addition, current research is increasingly revealing the extent to which ordinary people, of whichever Abrahamic faith, played fast and loose with their religion, whether intellectually or in their practical daily lives. Also, it is becoming increasingly clear that the old idea of Iberian distinctiveness from the rest of Europe in terms of religion, because of its long period under Islamic rule, has been exaggerated. In fact, the Jewish and Muslim life of late medieval Iberia can validly and usefully be compared with the internal doctrinal, as well as political, disputes of the rest of Catholic Christendom in that period (Edwards 1996, article III).

The religious picture which emerges from this lengthy and complex period in Iberia thus offers two conflicting, but partially truthful, pictures. One was the triumph of a Catholic Christianity, combining Church and State, which by 1500 had largely subjugated both Judaism and Islam in the Peninsula, and soon in Spanish and Portuguese overseas possessions across the

world. The second, equally valid and perhaps more attractive to twenty-first-century eyes, shows individuals, in Iberia and in colonies abroad, making daily accommodations in their lives which cut across, and indeed defied, the teachings of priests, rabbis and imams. It was in this diverse and kaleidoscopic way that Iberians entered modernity.

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