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Conversion as Education: Persuading the Jews in Juan Luis Vives's *De veritate fidei christianae* (1543)

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Abstract

This article explores how the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492/93–1540) understood religious conversion. It argues that in his earlier pedagogical and psychological works – *De institutione feminae christianae* (1524), *De officio mariti* (1529), *De disciplinis* (1531), and *De anima et vita* (1538) – Vives developed a model of education and learning which would subsequently inform his direct treatment of religious conversion in his posthumously published work *De veritate fidei christianae* (1543). Vives envisaged conversion as a process akin to humanistic education where an individual, guided by a teacher through a process of learning and reflection, became able to control the passions and to exercise reason in order to embrace Christianity.

Keywords

conversion – education – Humanism – Jews – Juan Luis Vives – passions – reason

Since the earliest times, the conversion of the Jews has loomed large in the Christian imagination; achieving it, however, was fraught with difficulties.¹ Nowhere illustrates these problems better than Spain in the period from 1391 to

¹ Kenneth Austin, *The Jews and the Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 3–24.

1550, where mass conversions of Jews and Muslims were traumatic events that led to an obsession with genealogy and a permanent state of “confrontation [...] and rejection” of perceived religious difference.² Despite these unedifying failures, the conversion of Jews became a key aim of the papacy in the early modern period, not least because it served as an important demonstration of the universalizing claims of Catholicism.³ More widely, the phenomenon of conversion was a central concern in European religious cultures across the confessional divides; individual religious choices and changes of allegiance were understood through the language of conversion.⁴ Meanwhile, colonial expansion placed Christianity into contact with new peoples, providing opportunities for evangelization on a scale not witnessed since the mass conversions of pagans in the early Middle Ages.⁵

The philosopher Juan Luis Vives (Valencia 1492/93–Bruges 1540), the most read Humanist of the sixteenth century after Erasmus, provides a unique viewpoint on the conversion of the Jews in his work *De veritate fidei christianae* (“On the Truth of the Christian Faith”, 1543).⁶ Ostensibly a work aimed at persuading pagans, Jews, and Muslims of the truth of the Christian faith, this treatise has long been read by scholars as addressing a primarily Spanish context. Vives was seeking the means to bring *conversos* and *moriscos* – the descendants of forced converts of Jewish and Muslim origin – fully into the fold of Christianity.⁷ Though this Spanish context is clearly significant, approaching *De veritate fidei christianae* only from this perspective is limiting; it needs to be understood as a part of his broader intellectual project. In his earlier pedagogical and psychological works, Vives outlined a model of education and learning that provides

2 Mercedes García-Arenal, “Creating *Conversos*: Genealogy and Identity as Historiographical Problems (after a Recent Book by Ángel Alcalá),” *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* 38, no. 1 (2013): 1–20 (2–3).

3 Emily Michelson, “Conversionary Preaching and the Jews in Early Modern Rome,” *Past & Present* 235, no. 1 (2017): 68–104 (75, 77), <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtx013>.

4 Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

5 See, for instance, Katharine Gerbner, “Theorizing Conversion: Christianity, Colonization, and Consciousness in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” *History Compass* 13, no. 3 (March 2015): 134–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12227>, and bibliography therein.

6 Enrique González González, “Fame and Oblivion,” in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Charles Fantazzi, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 359–413 (359). *De veritate fidei christianae* was published posthumously in Basle by Johannes Oporinus, Universal Short Title Catalogue 667804 [Accessed 11 January 2021].

7 Marcia L. Colish, “The *De Veritate Fidei Christianae* of Juan Luis Vives,” in *Christian Humanism: Essays in Honour of Arjo Vanderjagt*, ed. Alasdair A. MacDonald, Zweder R. W. M. von Martels, and Jan R. Veenstra (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 173–97 (175), and bibliography therein.

the key to understanding *De veritate fidei christianae*: religious conversion was a process akin to humanistic education. Placing *De veritate fidei christianae* in this broader intellectual context shows it to be more than simply the expression of the interior conflict of a *converso* whose family had been brutally persecuted by the Inquisition.⁸ It is, in important ways, the culmination of a lifetime of thinking and writing about Humanism, education, and religion.

1 Juan Luis Vives and *De veritate fidei christianae*

Understandings of the life and works of Juan Luis Vives have long been informed by his *converso* background and his upbringing in the multicultural society of Valencia.⁹ The revolt of the Brotherhoods (*Germanies*) in the early 1520s led to mass forced baptism and ongoing tensions with the newly-converted *moriscos*.¹⁰ Meanwhile, *conversos* in Valencia had been subject to inquisitorial scrutiny and persecution from the 1480s onwards. Vives's own family suffered more than most with sentences for crypto-Judaism passed on his four grandparents, an aunt, and uncle, and the burning of his father (1524) and of his mother's remains (1530).¹¹ It was as a result of these convictions that Vives spent his entire adult life in self-imposed exile outside of Spain.¹² Nonetheless, he stayed attuned to the affairs of his native land, remaining in close contact with the ruling elites of Valencia.¹³ For instance, he dedicated his *De officio mariti* (*On the Duties of the Husband*, 1528) to the third Duke of Gandía, Juan de Borja (1494–1543).¹⁴

8 Adriana Bongiovanni, "Juan Luis Vives filosofo converso: interpretazioni storiografiche," *Il confronto letterario* 2, no. 3 (1985): 53–67, noted the need to avoid essentializing readings of Vives's works but these types of interpretation have proved resilient. For an example of a critique of readings of Vives's biography that foregrounds his ancestry, see Enrique González González, "Juan Luis Vives: Works and Days," in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, 15–64 (50–53).

9 For a recent biography of Vives, see José Luis Villacañas, *Luis Vives: "Un Fatal Infortunio," Españoles Eminentes* (Barcelona: Taurus, 2021).

10 Isabelle Poutrin, *Convertir les musulmans: Espagne, 1491–1609* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012).

11 González González, "Juan Luis Vives: Works and Days," 25–7.

12 For a discussion about a possible intellectual dimension to this exile, see Enrique González González, "El exilio de Vives, un intelectual judeoconverso del siglo XVI," in *Exiliados: la emigración cultural valenciana (siglos XVI–XX)*, ed. Manuel García (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1995), 11–20.

13 González González, "Juan Luis Vives: Works and Days," 31.

14 Juan Luis Vives, *De officio mariti: Introduction, Critical Edition, Translation and Notes*, ed. Charles Fantazzi, vol. 8, *Selected works of J. L. Vives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2–7.

Despite the repeated assertions of some scholars, there is nothing in Vives's trajectory or thought to suggest that he was anything other than Christian.¹⁵ Moreover, his experience was shaped not solely by his Spanish upbringing. He was part of a *converso* diaspora in the Low Countries whose lives were markedly different from those of their Peninsular counterparts. A long-time resident of the city of Bruges, Vives married his cousin Margarita Valldaura, the daughter of a local merchant of Jewish origin.¹⁶ Intellectually, Vives was a northern European humanist, active in the circles of Erasmus and Thomas More.¹⁷ A philosopher rather than a theologian in the Erasmian mold, he nonetheless partook of the piety and concern with the study of the writings of Church Fathers that was the hallmark of Renaissance humanism.¹⁸

De veritate fidei christianae was Vives's last work. Unfinished at the time of his death, it was completed by his friend Francis Cranevelt (1485–1564), who added a dedication to Pope Paul III (r. 1534–1549).¹⁹ This dedication was

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- 15 A relatively recent example is Erika Rummel, "Humanists, Jews, and Judaism," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett, *Studies in Central European Histories* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 3–31 (9) that describes Vives as a "Jewish Humanist"; but see Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 74, who notes that "Vives is sincere in his Christianity, but does not wish to hide his love of his ancestry" (Vives es sincero en su cristianismo, pero no desea ocultar el amor por su linaje).
- 16 James S. Amelang, *Historias paralelas: judeoconvertos y moriscos en la España moderna*, Akal universitaria, Serie Historia moderna 321 (Madrid: Akal, 2011), 148–9; González González, "Juan Luis Vives: Works and Days," 39; Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 87. Sephardic identity developed in a similar fashion through the experience of exile and migration: Jonathan Ray, *After Expulsion: 1492 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 7–10.
- 17 Joseph Perez, "Erasmus, Moro y Vives," *eHumanista* 29 (2015):1–12, https://www.ehumanista.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.span.d7_eh/files/sitefiles/ehumanista/volume29/1%20ehum29.viv.perez.pdf.
- 18 Enrique González González, *Una república de lectores: difusión y recepción de la obra de Juan Luis Vives* (México: Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Universidad y la Educación, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Plaza y Valdés, 2007), 115. For a discussion of the importance of Christianity within humanism, see, for instance, Ada Palmer, "Humanist Lives of Classical Philosophers and the Idea of Renaissance Secularization: Virtue, Rhetoric, and the Orthodox Sources of Unbelief," *Renaissance Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2017): 935–76 (936), <https://doi.org/10.1086/693881>.
- 19 Juan Luis Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Gregorio Mayáns y Siscar, 8 vols. (Valencia: B. Monfort, 1782), 8: i–iv. All English translations my own unless otherwise indicated. Spanish translation: Juan Luis Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae: La verdad de la fe cristiana en cinco libros*, 2 vols. (València: Ajuntament de València, Delegación de Cultura, 2010). For a discussion of the problems posed by the unfinished nature of the text, see Edward V. George, "Múltiples voces en busca de supervivencia: Juan Luis Vives y el diálogo," in *La Universitat de València i l'humanisme: Studia Humanitatis i renovació cultural a Europa i al Nou Món*, ed. Ferran Grau Codina (València: Departament de

followed by a preface, originally penned by Vives, and five chapters or books. Book I presented the parameters of the discussion in the rest of the work; Vives sought to demonstrate the truth of Christianity without reliance on revelation and authority. Book II presented briefly the central doctrines of Christianity: the Trinity, the incarnation, the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, the messiahship and the teachings of Christ, and the establishment of the Apostolic Church. Books III and IV took the form of a dialogue between a Christian (*Christianus*) and a Jew (*Judaeus*) and a Muslim (*Alfaquinus*) respectively where the former seeks to demonstrate through reason the basic tenets of Christianity in relation to Judaism and Islam. Book V acted as an epilogue and contained a summary of the overall argument and an encomium of Christian values.

Though written in the form of a humanist treatise, *De veritate fidei christiana* partook of the *adversus Iudaeos* (against the Jews) genre that had originated in the late antique period and flourished throughout the Middle Ages.²⁰ *Adversus Iudaeos* texts took the form of a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew who discussed a series of questions – articles of the faith and points of exegesis – the answers to which would supposedly uncover religious truth. Though such works might sometimes result from actual debates, these texts were literary works that did not reflect real exchanges.²¹ Rather, they served to underline the unchallengeable veracity of Christianity and shore up the identity and solidarity of the faithful. Any potential to initiate actual conversion was subordinate to these concerns; as Latin texts, their primary audience was necessarily Christian and ecclesiastical.²² Any models of conversion contained within such texts were implicit and largely inchoate, a by-product of defining what Christianity was or should be rather than the result of a systematic reflection on conversion itself.

Filologia Clàssica, Universitat de València, 2003), 89–107 (104); but see also, Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 471.

20 There is an overview of the tradition in Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990); for Vives and this tradition, see Jesús Gómez, “El diálogo *Contra iudaeos* de Vives y su tradición medieval,” *Criticón* 41 (1988): 67–85.

21 Philippe Bobichon, “Persistance et avatars de la forme dialoguée dans la littérature chrétienne et juive de controverse: XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles,” in *Les dialogues adversus Iudaeos: permanences et mutations d’une tradition polémique: Actes du colloque international organisé les 7 et 8 décembre 2011 à l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne*, ed. Sébastien Morlet, Olivier Munnich, and Bernard Pouderon (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2013), 385–400 (387); Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Age*, 406.

22 Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds., “Introduction,” in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 10 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), vii–viii (vii).

Initially, the rhetorical exchanges in these texts relied predominantly on revealed truth and the authority of the Church to make their case but from the twelfth century onwards they included appeals to reason and rabbinic authority to make their arguments. Vives was, therefore, working within a genre with well-established parameters; the main innovations since Late Antiquity had come from changes in the tenor of the arguments and the specific doctrinal issues defended.²³ Vives brought a number of novelties to the tradition. Breaking from scholastic forms of argumentation, he offered instead a humanistic approach that employed eloquence as a method of persuasion. For the most part, he used dispassionate, reasoned dialogue rather than acrimonious dispute and appeals to authority.²⁴

2 The Problem of Conversion

Religious conversion is a notoriously difficult phenomenon to define. At its most basic, it entails “a shift in membership from one community of faith to another” but, as the authors of this definition note, conversion contains within it a multitude of elements and is subject to many variables: what cultural and behavioral changes are required, what mental readjustments need to be made, what is the role of divine intervention in the process.²⁵ For Christians, an authentic conversion can only ever be the product of a free, individual choice. Such a choice sets the neophyte on a path towards salvation but this is an endeavor that is never complete; growth in the faith is itself a form of conversion.²⁶ Though this idea of conversion as a gradual process rather than a sudden and complete transformation was understood and articulated by some early modern authors, more often than not, what conversion could entail was

23 Bobichon, “Persistance et avatars de la forme dialoguée,” 387, 400.

24 George, “Múltiples voces en busca de supervivencia,” 105; González González, *Una república de lectores*, 116. See also, Kaarlo Johannes Havu, “Dialogue and Toleration in Juan Luis Vives’s *De Veritate Fidei Christianae*: Vives on Muhammad and Islam,” *Medieval Encounters* 24, no. 5–6 (2018): 649–65, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340035>.

25 Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin, “Introduction,” in *Religious Conversion: History, Experience and Meaning*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Miri Rubin (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 1–30 (1); for an overview of scholarship of conversion, see Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 14–17.

26 Katznelson and Rubin, “Introduction,” 7–8; on the notion of freedom of choice and coercion in conversionary debates, see Marcia L. Colish, *Faith, Fiction and Force in Medieval Baptismal Debates* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), particularly 311–17.

left implicit in the sources rather than discussed openly.²⁷ Within polemical literature, discussions of conversion occur only in “conversion narratives,” first-person accounts of the author’s move from Judaism to Christianity, such as that authored in the early fifteenth century by Pablo de Santamaría in the opening of his *Additiones* (*Additions*) to Nicholas of Lyra’s glosses on Scripture.²⁸ Narratives such as Santamaría’s could be extremely influential; his was one of the most widely read accounts of conversion in the early modern period.²⁹ Nonetheless, they presented an unusual and highly individual perspective rather than an abstract discussion of conversion as a wider phenomenon. Vives’s *De veritate fidei christianae* is, therefore, a rare example within the polemical literature of this kind of abstract discussion of religious conversion itself, with the text approaching the issue from a general perspective in Books I, II, and V before moving onto the specific cases of Jews and Muslims in Books III and IV.

Despite its importance in the text, Vives did not attempt to define conversion explicitly. He preferred, instead, various formulations such as “to lead to the faith” or “to know the truth of the Christian faith and wish to ask God to grant it.”³⁰ For Vives, conversion was, in essence, a process whereby an individual, on receipt of the appropriate religious instruction, was able to examine doctrine systematically and to arrive at a decision to accept Christianity. Although Vives recognized the role of grace in the final step that decisively turned an individual towards God, he was less interested in its operation and focused instead on the earlier stages of the process – particularly the development of the individual’s understanding.³¹ Vives was not alone in such a focus. Kenneth Luria noted that early-modern conversion narratives highlight a “quandary over acts of faith” or, in other words, grappled with the question of whether conversion could be the sole product of a rational process to recognize the truth or whether it was necessary for God’s grace to act on the heart.³² Though the model of Augustine of Hippo’s conversion, with its

27 Michelson, “Conversionary Preaching and the Jews in Early Modern Rome,” 99.

28 Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, 2.

29 Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, 42–3.

30 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 4, 457: “fidem [...] exteros [...] perducendos”; “fidem Christianam sciamus veram esse, et velimus a Deo petere.”

31 Vives, 457; Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 476, notes that Vives was nonetheless unequivocal about grace as a freely-available gift from God: “Vives insists that we cannot have the slightest doubt. God chooses whoever requests it.” (Vives insiste en que no podemos tener la menor sombra de duda. Dios elige a quien se lo pide.)

32 Kenneth P. Luria, “Rituals of Conversion: Catholics and Protestants in Seventeenth-Century Poitou,” in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honor of*

emphasis on grace as the essential driver, was particularly influential – indeed, there was an early-modern “waxing” of the importance of the Augustinian paradigm – different authors combined elements of the tradition in a variety of ways.³³ Vives was, thus, far from the only author who focused on the intellectual elements of conversion but, through his writings as a whole, he offered a particularly rich and detailed analysis of the underlying process.

For Vives, at the heart of this process was reason. Reason was a gift from God leading humans ultimately to closeness to him. Its purpose was to discover what was good through a discursive process of comparison and deliberation, the results of which were then accepted or rejected by judgement.³⁴ In this model, the proselytizer effectively played the role of teacher, aiding the unbeliever in the exercise of their reason. Such a process equipped individuals to use their innate abilities and natural tendencies to overcome the impediments of unbelief and to achieve the ultimate aim for which they had been created. As will be seen, Vives’s ideas on the role of reason in inculcating the proper relationship with God can be best understood in the light of his earlier pedagogical and psychological works: conversion was, in essence, a form of humanistic education.

3 Conversion and Reason

Within *De veritate fidei christianae*, Vives rejected any methods of argumentation that relied on revealed truth and focused instead on human reason, justifying his approach on pragmatic grounds.³⁵ The use of reason was particularly important when dealing with unbelievers because not all of them had been

Natalie Zemon Davis, ed. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 65–81 (75–6, quotation at 75).

33 Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, 225–6.

34 For Vives’s understanding of what reason and judgement were, see Juan Luis Vives, *De anima et vita*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Gregorio Mayáns y Siscar, 8 vols. (Valencia: B. Monfort, 1782), 3: 353–64. For brief discussion, see Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 267, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-3220-9>; D. C. Andersson, “Juan Luis Vives (1492/93–1540): A Pious Eclectic,” in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 133–47 (143–4).

35 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 2: “the reasons that we are going to put forward in this work are certainly human.” (*rationes quidem fore humanas quibus in hoc opere sumus usuri*).

granted the gift of faith.³⁶ In essence, Vives stated that evangelization should not be restricted to those who, having been illuminated by God in their hearts, were willing to convert and thus required religious instruction. Instead, he made the case that religious instruction itself could create the circumstances for conversion; an extensive methodological discussion in Book I established the framework of this process.³⁷ This framework was based on the premise that natural reason was the only type of argument acceptable to unbelievers, who were not yet persuaded of the value or divine origins of arguments from Christian authorities.³⁸ In Book I, Vives also introduced the parameters for the discussion of the faith that he developed in subsequent sections of his tract. He departed from the notion that religion is a natural phenomenon and therefore, the existence of a God does not require proof or discussion.³⁹ Vives constructed his entire argument around two simple statements, which he held ought to be acceptable to a reasonable interlocutor. Firstly, that the true purpose of human existence is the achievement of perfection and happiness through an eternal union with God.⁴⁰ Secondly, that Christ's teachings provide the most apposite means to reach this union. Although Vives acknowledged the possibility that humans could reach God through other means, Christ's teaching is the only divinely-inspired one, the simplest and most-assured.⁴¹ Christ did not seek to

36 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 3: "But, since this is such a sublime gift [the Holy Spirit and its spiritual anointment] that is neither granted to all nor at all times, we shall use in its stead well-chosen reasons." (Quod munus quum tam sublime sit ut nec omnibus, nec omni tempore detur, utemur sane hujus loco exquisitis rationibus).

37 Paul Graf, *Luis Vives como apologeta: contribución a la historia de la apologética*, trans. José María Millás Vallicrosa (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco Suárez, 1943), 22.

38 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 13: "We will therefore investigate truth led by natural light, since it alone remains between us and those who resist [i.e. unbelievers], as the only way to tread while searching for a sliver of truth." (Naturali ergo luce verum indagabimus, quando haec sola inter nos, et repugnantes relicta est, tamquam via, qua insistamus ad aliquam vestigationem veritatis).

39 This premise implies an argument against Aristotelian positions that deny the immortality of the soul. Colish, "The *De Veritate Fidei christianae* of Juan Luis Vives," 185; Graf, *Luis Vives como apologeta*, 36.

40 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 110–11: "man was created in himself so that all his good and happiness would depend exclusively on his creator. [...] But in God all is supremely peaceful, beautiful, and blessed [...]. There the soul, marvellously wishes, yearns, and calls out to return." (Creatus est igitur homo propter se ipsum, ut a solo conditore suo bonum omne ipsius, et beatitudo dependeret. [...] In Deo autem quieta omnia, pulcherrima, beatissima [...] illuc ergo mire cupit animus reverti, et suspirat, et clamat).

41 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 43: "Thus God himself, led by his love of us, came to us to be the teacher of such a great good" (Idcirco Deum ipsum amore nostri adductum venisse ad nos, ut esset tanti boni magister).

instruct humans how to govern society but instead taught them solely how to achieve salvation.⁴² On this simple basis – accepting Christ as the way to achieve the eternal union with the divine – Vives argued that conversion could be realized.

For Vives, all human beings had the potential to achieve salvation but, as a result of the Fall, human will had been damaged.⁴³ Humans were hindered in the exercise of those divinely-given faculties that could bring them to salvation.⁴⁴ Such impairment was particularly pronounced with regard to the faculties of the mind, hence the need to focus on reason to achieve religious conversion. Reason remained the most powerful of human faculties, capable of swaying an individual's opinion. Nothing – not even miracles – carried greater probatory value than those truths demonstrated through the operation of reason.⁴⁵ The correct exercise of reason was, nonetheless, fraught with difficulty. Though humans had been redeemed through Christ and offered a route to eternal life, serious obstacles stood in their way.⁴⁶ The body itself and

42 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 435: “[to teach] us how we could return to the eternal good from which we had been separated; that alone was fitting for Him to deliver. All other more humble things pertaining to human life, He left to human ingenuity.” (Ad aeterna illa rediremus bona, unde decideramus; hoc solum decebat illum exhibere; cetera humiliora, quae ad vitae hujus decursum pertineret, humani ingenii solertiae reliquit).

43 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 8: “man [...] has been provided with a better and more distinguished condition so his will receives indication of its tendency towards its end” (hominem, [...] potiore, potiore ac praestabiliore conditione esse praeditum, ut voluntati propensio sui finis sit indita). There is a discussion of the Fall in pp. 123–33.

44 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 126: “only men move and stay away from their own [perfection], which is the cultivation of the mind and of wisdom” (soli homines a sua [perfectione] sunt aversi et abhorrent, nempe a cultu mentis, et sapientia).

45 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 20: “But, who can doubt that among the so-called human faculties and powers, when it comes to leading men towards a particular opinion, reason has the greatest power, which alone can change the human mind, free and invincible for other powers, whatever they may be that are directed against it? And what of that sometimes, in certain places and occasions, it is for some people even more effective that belief in miracles?” (¿Sed quis possit tandem dubitare, quod inter eas, quae humanae facultates, viresque nominantur, ad ducendos homines in eam, quam velis sententiam, maximum robur habeat ratio, quae sola flectit humanam mentem, liberam aliis viribus omnibus, atque invictam, quaecumque admoveantur? ¿Quid, quod aliquot interdum locis et temporibus, et apud nonnullos hominum efficacior est quoque, quam fides prodigiorum?).

46 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 132: “The arrival and the reconciliation of Christ gave us back what we required, that is, the road to eternal goods.” (Christi adventus et reconciliatio reddidit quo expeditabat, nempe viam ad aeterna bona).

the passions were the greatest burden on reason.⁴⁷ Sin, as far as it removed humans from a close relationship with God, clouded judgement and made individuals susceptible to being ruled by their passions and prey to defective reasonings. This was particularly the case with unbelievers who were entirely removed from God and were thus even more likely to be enslaved by the passions and suffer from a clouded mind.⁴⁸

De veritate fidei christianae was, then, both a structured exposition of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and a guide to the training of reason. As Vives himself acknowledged, he was not the first to use reason within religious argumentation. It was the method most congruent with human nature and had the endorsement of Christ and the Apostles.⁴⁹ Furthermore, since the eleventh century, polemicists had explored the potential of reason to overcome the difficulties of relying on authority to prove Christian dogma to non-believers who did not accept the authority of Scripture or the truth of revelation.⁵⁰ In particular, Vives followed Thomas Aquinas's position, as presented in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (*Summary against the Pagans*, 1265), that established the harmony between reason and the truth of Christianity while accepting the limits of reason alone in arriving at divine truths.⁵¹ Vives was at his most innovative in the choice of subject matter: he rejected the strategy of refuting non-Christian positions – a strategy typical of much of the *adversus Iudaeos* tradition – and argued instead that an exposition of the basic tenets of Christianity was nonetheless sufficient to achieve conversion.⁵² Implicit in his outlook was the idea that true religious convictions could not arise from being vanquished or outwitted in a debate but were instead the product of

47 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 119: “the passions and the body, which are a hindrance to reason.” (affectus et corpus, quae impedimento sunt ratione).

48 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 15: “As he [man] separated himself from God, he fell into this calamity, and that light was darkened and blindness and a mist clouded the mind so that he could not appreciate truth nor that which is useful; and even if at one point he manages to see it, a dense cloud rises at once, be it passions, ignorance or error, that takes away any vision.” (At ubi separans se a Deo, lapsus est in hanc calamitatem, obscurata est lux illa, caecitas, et caligo menti obducta, ut nec vera, nec utilia satis perspiciat; et si quando intueatur, confestim oborta nubes vel affectuum, vel ignorantiae, vel inconsiderationes densissima, conspectum omnem adimit).

49 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 18–19.

50 There are overviews of these works in Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Age*, 423–40; and Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, 68–76.

51 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 13–14; the most systematic comparison between Vives and Aquinas remains Graf, *Luis Vives como apologeta*, 22–31; on reason in Aquinas, see Rudi A. te Velde, “Natural Reason in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 4 (1994): 42–70.

52 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 23–4.

an individual's free exercise of reason. Conversion was a form of education, in which an individual was guided by a teacher through a gradual process of understanding that led them ultimately to embrace God.

4 Conversion and Education

By offering education and moral discipline as the tools to overcome the passions and to enable reason to guide the human mind towards conversion, Vives was drawing on ideas he had earlier developed as a philosopher of education, at the forefront of humanistic discourse on pedagogy, psychology, and epistemology.⁵³ Vives rehearsed these ideas in a series of works, namely, *De institutione feminae christianae* (*The Education of a Christian Woman*, 1524), *De officio mariti* (1529), and, more extensively, *De disciplinis* (*On the Disciplines*, 1531), particularly Books 8–12 grouped under the title of *De tradendis disciplinis* (*On Handing Down the Disciplines*), and in *De anima et vita* (*On the Soul and Life*, 1538). Throughout these works, Vives offered a model of humanist education as a “morally regenerative” enterprise in which learning would lead to development of a “true Christian spirit” and lead to virtuous behavior.⁵⁴ Likewise, like other humanist scholars, Vives advocated for a utilitarian education that employed reason to tame the emotions. Vives's own contribution was centered on the idea that reason based on experience, rather than past authorities, was the guiding principle in the acquisition of knowledge.⁵⁵

53 On the value of education to overcome the passions, see Elena Carrera, “Augustinian, Aristotelian, and Humanist Shaping of Medieval and Early Modern Emotion: *Affectus*, *Affectio*, and ‘Affection’ as Travelling Concepts,” in *Before Emotion: The Language of Feeling, 400–1800*, ed. Juanita Ruys, Michael Champion, and Kirk Essay (New York: Routledge, 2019), 170–84 (175–6); Vives, *De officio mariti*, 14–15: “This mist of the heart is dispelled and illuminated by learning. The depraved proclivity of the mind is directed towards what is better by virtuous habits.” (Caligo haec cordis doctrina discutitur atque illustratur, et prava animi proclivitas moribus et consuefactione in melius flectitur). On Vives as a philosopher of education, see Bernard Jolibert, “L'oeuvre éducative de Jean-Louis Vives,” in *L'éducation de la femme chrétienne*, trans. Pierre de Changy (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), 7–54 (8); Fiona Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540)” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1996), 1.

54 Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 125; Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 141.

55 Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 171–2. See also Karin Tilmans, “From *Institutio* to *Educatio*: The Origin of Political Education in the Habsburg Netherlands,” in *The Education of a Christian Society: Humanism and the*

For Vives, the ultimate aim of education was to enable humans to fulfil their divinely-mandated aim: to reach God and participate of him in eternity.⁵⁶ In that sense, conversion and education were parts of the same continuum, the essential first steps towards a life of piety and salvation came from education.⁵⁷ Education also built an awareness of the fallibility of the human condition and of the means to overcome this handicap. A Christian education revealed how humans required divine assistance to prevail over their weak natures and inclination towards evil.⁵⁸ But education, since it showed what was good and what was required to achieve salvation, also afforded protection from vice.⁵⁹ The full extent of the redemptive value of education within Vives's thought becomes clear in his discussions of the relationship between reason, the will, and the passions. Through the analysis of this relationship, through the understanding of the process of cognition, humans might be better able to achieve salvation.

As Vives noted in his *De anima*, God furnished humans with the attributes to reach eternal life; through knowledge and judgement people could free themselves from evil and seek good.⁶⁰ In order to be able to exercise these faculties correctly, it was necessary to have an understanding of the soul itself.⁶¹ Reason was central to the functioning of the soul: its ultimate aim was to gain knowledge of God, but it also enlightened the will so that the latter might be able to choose what was good.⁶² The correct function of the will was impeded by a number of factors; sin and the passions, for example, could exert influence on reason and prevent the individual from exercising their faculties

Reformation in Britain and the Netherlands, ed. N. Scott Amos, Andrew Pettegree, and Henk F. K. van Nierop, *St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 41–61 (43, 45).

56 Juan Luis Vives, *De disciplinis: Savoir et enseigner*, ed. and trans. Tristan Vigliano, *Le miroir des humanistes 13* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2013), 278–80, 286–7; Juan Luis Vives, *Vives: On Education. A Translation of the "De Tradendis Disciplinis" of Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Foster Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 18–19, 28; Skelton, "The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives," 148.

57 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 278–80; Vives, *On Education*, 18–19.

58 Vives, *On Education*, 84; Skelton, "The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives," 142.

59 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 298; Vives, *On Education*, 44; Vives, *De officio mariti*, 127; Juan Luis Vives, *De institutione feminae Christianae: Liber primus*, ed. Constantinus Matheussen and Charles Fantazzi, *Selected works of J.L. Vives 6* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 26–7; see also Skelton, "The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives," 134–5.

60 Vives, *De anima*, 421–2.

61 Vives, *De anima*, 298–9.

62 Vives, *De anima*, 353–62, 382–7.

appropriately.⁶³ A particular problem arose when, through a lack of understanding, incredulity and suspicion took hold in the mind.⁶⁴

In *De tradendis disciplinis*, Vives offered a detailed discussion of the exercise of the faculty of reason. Reason ruled body and mind and linked humans with God. Despite its central importance in guiding people towards a virtuous life, as highlighted by the example of Christ himself, the apostles, and holy men, there were serious hindrances to its correct functioning.⁶⁵ Human life was a perpetual struggle between the intellect and the passions; when the latter were able to rule, humans turned into beasts and their perdition was inevitable.⁶⁶ Sin enabled the passions to take hold and to cloud the intellect; reason was then unable to operate, thus separating the soul from God.⁶⁷ Habitual sinning made these problems all the greater: the mind became dulled by folly and torpor just as the eyes were weakened and even blinded by repeated injuries.⁶⁸ Education provided the remedy because Christian teachings were effective cures to the diseases of the mind so that reason could rule the passions and, in turn, humans could truly turn towards God.⁶⁹

Vives, however, did not simply assert the redemptive value of education but also gave considerable space to discussing the conditions for its success as a moral enterprise. Learners were not empty vessels waiting to be filled but rather active participants in the process of education.⁷⁰ Teaching had to be adjusted to the temperament and abilities of each child and aimed at correcting their specific faults. While all learning served to develop morality, there was a need to begin with a particular emphasis on Christian doctrine. The teacher had to introduce pupils to the authority of Scripture through select passages that acted as a remedy given at the minimum appropriate dose to be effective.⁷¹ Reason itself was an essential element within education, which helped beginners to learn and memorize concepts and was at the center of the

63 Vives, *De anima*, 353–62.

64 Vives, *De anima*, 362–4.

65 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 450–51; Vives, *On Education*, 250–51.

66 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 451. Vives notes that, once the passions take root in an individual, they become very difficult to eradicate, *De disciplinis*, 328–9; *On Education*, 251, 84. On the power of the passions to disturb the soul, see Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 207.

67 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 450–51; Vives, *On Education*, 251.

68 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 320–21; Vives, *On Education*, 74. On the difficulty of breaking bad habits, see Vives, *De institutione feminae Christianae: Liber primus*, 14–17.

69 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 451–2; Vives, *On Education*, 251–2.

70 Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 210.

71 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 333, 370; Vives, *On Education*, 89, 139.

cognitive process.⁷² In an echo of the understanding of the role of reason in achieving salvation, Vives noted that when reason ruled over the passions, all other elements of the education process followed.⁷³ Likewise, innate abilities to grasp the truth had to be cultivated assiduously with the help of a teacher for them to operate correctly: in particular, the exercise of judgement led to human intellectual virtue.⁷⁴ The need for humans to exert themselves in the application of reason and the arduous nature of education, were, for Vives, the consequence of sin.⁷⁵

5 The Conversion of the Jews

What were the implications of Vives's views for the conversion of the Jews? As has been shown, conversion was, in essence, the product of an extended exercise of the faculties of the mind which guided an individual to freedom and salvation.⁷⁶ Jews were capable of conversion because they were equal to Christians in their faculties; their unbelief was not a natural state but rather the product of their failure to properly apply reason.⁷⁷ Indeed, Vives argued that embracing the faith ought to be a simpler process for Jews because the intellectual and spiritual distance that separated Judaism from Christianity was very small. What was required was that a Jew accept the correct, that is, spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament and this, in turn, would lead the individual inevitably towards Christianity and baptism.⁷⁸ Once overly literal and limited interpretations of Scripture were rejected, a Jew could understand

72 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 345–6 and, more widely on cognitive processes, 293–5; Vives, *On Education*, 106, 37–8; Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 144.

73 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 472; Vives, *On Education*, 281.

74 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 281; Vives, *On Education*, 21; Skelton, “The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives,” 34.

75 Vives, *De disciplinis*, 296; Vives, *On Education*, 40.

76 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 304: “But if you convert to God with the power of the mind, you will be free and His children” (*conversi autem ad Deum per virtutes mentis, eritis liberi, et filii*).

77 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 300: “Is reason not a similar and equal faculty both for you and for us, that always manifests itself with greater force and clarity in favour of truth?” (*¿Deinde, ratio num non res est aequa, vobis et nobis par, pro veritate semper fortior, ac manifestior?*).

78 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 248: “if you manage to understand it [the Old Testament] in all its truth and as it is proper, in that same instant you will be a Christian, and you will request baptism” (*Si eo usque perveneris, ut vere, et quemadmodum decet, intelligas, illico eris Christianus, et baptismum petes*).

the proper relationship between God and man and grasp the true purpose of his own existence.⁷⁹ Likewise, by casting aside Jewish notions of a deity with human shape and attributes, subject to passions and emotions, a Jew could recognize and acknowledge the true infinitude and majesty of God.⁸⁰ This contrast between carnal Israel, “weighed down and oppressed,” and spiritual Israel, “liberated and preserved” by Christ, informs much of the earlier polemical literature.⁸¹ Vives’s innovation was his approach: rather than attempt to refute a long list of literal interpretations of Scripture, he discussed simple general principles – the true nature of God and human beings, and the correct interpretation of the Law.

There were, nonetheless, serious obstacles to the conversion of the Jews. For Vives, what checked the ability of the Jews to apply reason effectively was not innate incapacity but rather the intellectually stifling power of tradition and community. The Jews clung fiercely to their sect and to the doctrines of their ancestors.⁸² As their fathers had done before them, they held fast to “childish and unseemly words,”⁸³ and so could not recognize Christ as the Messiah. If a Jew were only to look beyond the Talmud and the teachings of rabbis, to cultivate their mind beyond the limited horizons of their community, they would perceive the iniquities of their faith. Likewise, prostrate in the synagogue and burning with hatred for Christ and Christians, a Jew would embrace a vision of God that he would reject with embarrassment given a moment’s reflection

79 Taken literally, the precepts of the Law did not fit the dignity and true nature of man. Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 262: “You were created for the purpose of eternal happiness; you are going towards it and in order to arrive at your destination you are united with God through worship and love. Pray, tell me, what does it matter for that path towards happiness to have eaten pork, or to have sewn wool and linen, and many other such things that there are in your law?” (Tu aeternae beatitudini es conditus, illuc tendis, illuc ut pervenias, Deo te adjungis cultu, et amore: quaeso te, quid ad iter illius felicitatis vel esus porcinae facit, vel lana lino assuta, et alia quae sunt in lege vestra ejusmodi innumerabilia?).

80 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 248–54.

81 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 360: “alterum carnalem, qui adeo erat oppressus, et afflicto, [...] alterum spiritalem, qui liberatur et servatur germine Domini.”

82 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 4: “the Jew clings onto his sect desperately, as does the Saracen and the rest of the infidels, relying on the teaching of their parents, and they do not consider where their mind and reason would lead them if they invoked their help” (Sic Judaeus adhaeret mordicus suae sectae, sic Sarracenus, et ceteri, quoniam eas a parentibus acceperunt; nec excutiant quo mens, et ratio, si apte in consilium adhiberentur, eos essent tandem perducturae).

83 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 269: “crassitiae litterae puerilis, ac ineptae.”

outside.⁸⁴ Thus, a dialogue of the kind that Vives staged between Christianus and Iudaeus could take place only if one of the Jews did not think like the others, then he might be brought back to right thinking.⁸⁵

The importance of this dynamic to Vives's overall argument is demonstrated by the changing tone of his writing. In apparent contrast to his stated aim of a discussion free of acrimony and invective, Vives has Christianus express irritation and anger on a number of occasions.⁸⁶ Christianus, for example, describes Jewish interpretations of Scripture as puerile and abject, confected by the rabbis, whom he judges to be fatuous and shameless.⁸⁷ These articulations of annoyance and anger are most vehement in those sections where Christianus is trying to persuade Iudaeus to recognize as fallacious those notions that authority and tradition have led him to accept unreflectingly.⁸⁸ Far from impassioned outbursts, puncturing the smooth surface of Vives's reasoning, such displays of emotion were an integral part of his argumentation.⁸⁹ As Vives's writings on the emotions make clear, anger and irritation could serve positive ends. Though they were often misdirected or counterproductive, their fundamental purposes were admonitory and preservative. Irritation served to make man "recoil immediately after the first taste of evil," while anger was "to make him desire what is best" and strive for self-improvement.⁹⁰ In deploying such emotions in *De veritate fidei christianae*, Vives was not attempting to

84 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 254: "There is no Jew who, when he hears these things in the synagogue in that heat of the soul, inflamed with hatred against Jesus and the Christians, from which you begin all your sacrifices, does not look up and worship; the same things, if he hears them outside, that ardor cooled, he will be reddened with blushes, that he accepts and approves them." (Nullus est Iudaeus, qui quum haec audit in synagoga in calore illo animi, in flamma odii adversus Jesum et Christianos, a quo sacrificia vestra omnia auspicamini, non suspiciat, et adoret; eadem si ardore illo refrigerato foris audiat, suffundetur rubore, quod hujusmodi recipiat, et approbet).

85 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 247–48; George, "Múltiples voces en busca de supervivencia," 102.

86 Edward V. George, "Author, Adversary, and Reader: A View of the *De Veritate Fidei Christianae*," in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Charles Fantazzi, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 315–55 (331).

87 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 252, 254.

88 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 251, 253–4, 257, 263.

89 Some authors have interpreted this animus as a means of self-protection from the attention of the Inquisition. See, for example, Edward V. George, "Rules of Engagement: The Humanist Apologetics of Vives' *De Veritate Fidei Christianae*," *Erasmus Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 1–36 (26), <https://doi.org/10.1163/187492707X00050>.

90 Juan Luis Vives, *The Passions of the Soul: The Third Book of "De Anima et Vita"*, trans. Carlos G. Noreña, *Studies in Renaissance Literature* 4 (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 63, 74.

inculcate similar emotional responses in potential Jewish converts. Rather, he was using irritation and anger to signpost to the Christian reader where the greatest impediments to conversion lay; these emotions were not disruptive passions but the appropriate response to Jewish unreason.⁹¹

Even if an individual Jew could look beyond their community, could be persuaded to apply reason to matters of religion and to debate the truth of Christianity, tradition still weighed upon them. Rabbinical teaching was, Vives argued, intellectually sterile; it neither revealed the truth nor equipped individuals to discover the truth for themselves.⁹² Indeed, Vives had Christianus insist that he would prefer to debate with pagan philosophers, whose learning and wisdom better equipped them for such a dialogue, than with intellectually stunted Jews.⁹³ The means to break free from these constraints was exposure to Christianity. Knowledge of the truth could rekindle the faculty of reason and this reason would in turn reaffirm the truth and deepen the understanding of it.⁹⁴ This was not, however, a single act but an extended process of learning where an individual was guided by a teacher.⁹⁵ Disputation could not and would not lead to an immediate conversion – not even in Vives's fictive dialogue could Iudaeus acknowledge the persuasiveness of the arguments put before him. Instead, as Christianus noted at the end of Book III, the preceding dialogue was the starting point of a process of deliberation that should follow

91 Amy M. Schmitter, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, updated April 8, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=emotions-17th18th>; Lorenzo Casini, "Juan Luis Vives' Conception of Freedom of the Will and Its Scholastic Background," *Vivarium* 44, no. 2/3 (2006): 396–417 (406–7); Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions, Philosophical Explorations* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 180–82.

92 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 269.

93 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 255: "it would be easier and faster for me to dispute with a gentile: [...] you do not [show] anything except obstinacy, pertinacy, ignorance of the world, and a frenzied passion for denying everything" (*Levior mihi, et expeditior esset cum gentili concertatio: [...] vos nihil nisi obstinatam pertinaciam, ignorantiam universorum, et rabiem cuncta damnandi*). See translation in George, "Author, adversary, and reader," 319.

94 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 16: "Knowledge of the truth, as I was saying shortly before, engenders reason, and reason applied confirms the truth." (*Parit sicuti paulo anteba dicebam, rationem cognita veritas, et veritatem confirmat adhibita ratio*).

95 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 3: "Furthermore, in these books we have done or attempted nothing other than to lead, as it were, by the hand and teach to whom it [the faith] should be asked, how this should be done, and through whom, always the Lord Christ." (*At nos his libris omnibus nihil aliud egimus, nihil conati sumus, nisi ut veluti manu duceremus, et ostenderemus, a quo ea sit petenda, quomodo postuletur, et per quem, semper Christum Dominum*).

the method demonstrated in the text itself.⁹⁶ Conversion might then follow but only as the product of a process of thoughtful engagement, of a gradual maturation of ideas and understanding, and a long process of reflection.

In *De veritate fidei christianae*, Vives offered a model of the process of conversion, a mapping of the intellectual stages that led an individual to the truth of Christianity. Instead of disputation, polemic, and persecution, conversion was achieved by education. Through heuristic learning, rather than didactic instruction, individuals could overcome their passions, exercise their reason, and, ultimately, embrace Christianity. What Vives did not offer was a method of conversion. His text was not a primer for converts nor a practical program for the clergy.⁹⁷ Its audience was Christians themselves and, to that extent, like other *adversus Iudaeos* texts, *De veritate fidei christianae* addresses Christian self-definition.⁹⁸ Yet the text is more than this. Discussing the unbelief of the Jews was not simply a means to highlight errors to Christians. By placing reason at the center of the process, Vives made two key points about the conversion of the Jews. First, that such conversion was possible. Reason was possessed by all humans and reason would lead to the divine. Secondly, that the conversion of the Jews was fraught with difficulties. Despite the closeness of Judaism to Christianity, in the Jews the faculty of reason had been diminished. Only when reason was trained could conversion happen; refutation of error and appeal to authority were insufficient.

6 Conclusion

Vives has long been recognized as a critic of existing education systems and a proponent of alternative pedagogical methods as outlined in his *De tradendis*

96 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 364: “I would not wish that you would judge it, after merely listening to it, to reject it or approve it but, to the contrary, place all of it frequently under a subtle and precise of examination of reason.” (Quam nolim ex hac sola auditione censeas ad eam vel abjiciendam, vel approbandam, sed, [...] eam totam ad subtile, ac exactum iudicii examen crebrò revocato).

97 The contrast with one of the main sources for Vives’s work is notable. Bernardo Pérez de Chinchón discusses how the clergy ought to teach the *moriscos* in Valencia to achieve their complete conversion. Bernardo Pérez de Chinchón, *Antialcorano: conversión y evangelización de moriscos*, ed. Francisco Pons Fuster, Norte crítico 1 (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2000), 389–91, 393–5; on Pérez de Chinchón as a source for Vives, see George, “Author, Adversary, and Reader,” 346.

98 On the Christian readership of *De veritate fidei christianae*, see George, “Rules of Engagement”; George, “Author, Adversary, and Reader,” 330. For a discussion of the text in the context of the controversies surrounding the Reformation, see Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 470–76.

disciplinis.⁹⁹ *De veritate fidei christianae* should be read in a similar fashion; its discussion of conversion functioned both as a critique of previous efforts and an outline for an alternative model. The appeal to reasoned exposition of the truths of the faith followed by a process of individual reflection and maturation carried an implicit censure of earlier conversionary methods. Just as children were not empty vessels into which knowledge could be poured, true religious conviction could not arise from being vanquished in disputation or debate. Instead, Vives argued religious instruction based on reason and endorsed by the authority and example of Christ and the Apostles, could lead individuals from infidelity to baptism.

Whether Vives's model could ever be translated into effective pastoral action seems unlikely. In addition to the difficulties he himself identified, his argument relied on a series of a priori assumptions likely to alienate any real-life opponent – such as the insistence on Christian scriptural hermeneutics or even the specific concepts of God and eternal life. Likewise, Vives's insistence on individual processes of cognition and reasoning made large-scale proselytizing impractical. The significance of *De veritate fidei christianae* lies not in its practical implications but in its repositioning of conversion itself. Vives was constructing a humanist model of conversion; as education led to moral improvement and the fulfilment of divinely mandated potential in humans, so training of the reason could lead the Jews to abandon the moral failures that arose from their unbelief and achieve the ultimate goal of salvation.¹⁰⁰ In the same way, just as humanists saw education as the precondition for individuals to become active citizens, through the cultivation of personal virtue, Vives envisaged conversion as producing not just virtuous Christians but also full participants in civic life.¹⁰¹ Christianity furnished humans with the best set of rules, based on mutual love, and thus Christians were more suited than any others to live in a peaceful and well-ordered society.¹⁰² In short, in *De veritate fidei christianae* Vives brings conversion fully into the humanist project. By recasting it as a process of education, Vives showed conversion to be part of a continuum of individual reform. It was not a freestanding transference

99 See, for example, Lorenzo Casini, "Juan Luis Vives [Joannes Ludovicus Vives]," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, updated March 19, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/vives/>.

100 On education as moral improvement, see Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 148–9; on human potential and divine commandment, see Skelton, "The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives," 142.

101 On personal virtue and active citizenship, see Skelton, "The Content, Context and Influence of the Work of Juan Luis Vives," 46.

102 Vives, *De veritate fidei christianae*, 449–52. For some remarks about Vives's civic values and how they inform the text's outlook, see Villacañas, *Luis Vives*, 473–4.

of religious allegiance but one manifestation of the ongoing commitment, incumbent on all Christians, to growth in the faith.

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