

‘Saint Paul, the Apostolic Age and the status of *conversos* in Alonso de Espina’s *Fortalitium fidei* (1464) and Hernando de Talavera’s *Católica impugnación* (1480)’¹

What was the *nova creatura* brought forth through the waters of baptism? What was carried over from the past life of the neophyte, how was the old to be made new? After mass conversions of Jews to Christianity, such questions held especial potency in fifteenth-century Spain. What was the value of the Jewish past or the Jewish ancestry of these converts and their descendants, these *conversos* or New Christians? Certain voices within Spain insisted Jewish ancestry to be an indelible stain that made *conversos* suspect in their faith. For others, this ancestry was a source of pride, marking a special closeness to Christ and a privileged place within salvation history. Proponents of this latter position drew strength and support from their distinctive readings of the Letters of Saint Paul –readings that modern scholarship has labelled ‘*converso* Paulinism’. Less a discrete body of interpretation and more a particular hermeneutic, *converso* Paulinism emerged as writers sought to understand their own conversions or their own ancestry and to make sense of what had happened and what was still happening in late-medieval Spain. Its specific content shifted with the changing circumstances, from the autobiographical impulse and claims to continuing social privilege of the convert Pablo de Santamaría (1353–1435), to the defence of New Christians from the attacks of those seeking to exclude them from public office in Toledo in 1449 by Alonso de Cartagena (1385–1456) or Juan de Torquemada (1388–1468).²

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² For a definition of Paulinism, see Claude B. Stuczynski, ‘*Converso* Paulinism and Residual Jewishness: Conversion from Judaism to Christianity as a Theologico-Political Problem’, in *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present*, ed. Theodor Dunkelgrün and Paweł Maciejko (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 114, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812296754-007>; on this concept, see also Claude B. Stuczynski, ‘From Polemics and Apologetics to Theology and Politics: Alonso de Cartagena and the *Conversos* within the “Mystical Body”’, in *Conflict*

This article argues that *converso* Paulinism was but one facet of a more widespread engagement with the Apostolic Age and the Pauline corpus in fifteenth-century Spain. *Converso* Paulinism developed not in isolation but in response to assaults on the status of New Christians.³ The central years of the fifteenth century were a period of fervent textual production and fierce intellectual argument, as theologians, lawyers, and lawmakers sought to fix the place of *conversos* within Christian society.⁴ Debate and polemic, as well as violence and legal measures, would lead ultimately, in David Nirenberg's oft-quoted words, to the social and theological transformation of the 'convert from Christian back into "Jew."' ⁵ The success of this transformation, and the concomitant descent of Spanish society into discrimination and persecution, was far from inevitable in the middle decades of the fifteenth century.⁶ The relative influence of those who regarded *conversos* as faithful Christians and those who saw them as inescapably tainted by their Jewish ancestry fluctuated over time. Both sides had potent advocates and powerful supporters; that persecution would win out over integration was not preordained.

The various authors who addressed the status of *conversos* in the mid-fifteenth century could hardly avoid recourse to the Epistles of Paul and the example of the Apostolic Age. The Pauline corpus repeatedly

and Religious Conversation in Latin Christendom: Studies in Honour of Ora Limor, ed. Israel Yuval and Ram Ben-Shalom, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 253–75, <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.CELAMA-EB.1.102017>; Claude B. Stuczynski, 'Pro-*Converso* Apologetics and Biblical Exegesis', in *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Exegesis, Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Jonathan P. Decker and Arturo Prats Oliván, *Etudes Sur Le Judaïsme Médiéval* 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 151–76; María Laura Giordano, '«La ciudad de nuestra conciencia»: los conversos y la construcción de la identidad judeocristiana (1449-1556)', *Hispania Sacra* 62, no. 125 (2010): 43–91, <https://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2010.v62.i125.243>; Bruce Rosenstock, *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Castile*, Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar 39 (London: Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary, University of London, 2002).

³ Stuczynski, 'Converso Paulinism and Residual Jewishness', 114.

⁴ Yosi Yisraeli and Yanay Israeli, 'Defining "Conversos" in Fifteenth-Century Castile: The Making of a Controversial Category', *Speculum* 97, no. 3 (2022): 609–10.

⁵ David Nirenberg, 'Figures of Thought and Figures of Flesh: "Jews" and "Judaism" in Late-Medieval Spanish Poetry and Politics', *Speculum* 81, no. 2 (2006): 417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713400002633>.

⁶ Stefania Pastore, *Il vangelo e la spada: l'inquisizione di Castiglia e i suoi critici (1460-1598)*, *Temi e testi* 46 (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003).

interrogated the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the significance of the Old Law to the New. Such themes were likewise prominent features of the Acts of the Apostles, most notably in its account of the Council of Jerusalem. Yet the uses these authors made of the Apostolic Age went beyond the simple appeal to authority; in essence, the religious problems that beset fifteenth-century Spain were understood to be but a recapitulation of those faced –and solved– by the early Church. However, the lessons drawn could be radically different. The Letters of Paul combined unassailable authority with interpretive possibility: the corpus was heterogeneous in nature and capable of supporting widely divergent conclusions regarding the place of conversos within Christian society. Where *converso* Paulinism could find in the Epistles endorsement of what Claude Stuczynski has labelled ‘positive Jewish residues [...] beyond conversion’, opponents could equally well find a mandate for exclusion and persecution.⁷

The fundamental contours of *converso* Paulinism have been well-mapped in recent years. There has, however, been little scrutiny of how its opponents responded to its ideas and challenged its premises. This article addresses this lack through the study of two texts: Alonso de Espina’s *Fortalitium fidei* (1464) and Hernando de Talavera’s *Católica impugnación* (1480).⁸ These texts stand at two different points in the development of the *converso* problem.⁹ Writing in the decade that followed the Toledo revolt of 1449, Alonso de Espina used *Fortalitium fidei* alongside his preaching and his influence at the court of Enrique IV to call for a papal-style inquisition to eradicate the crypto-Judaism he believed to be endemic amongst *conversos*.¹⁰ While neither the Crown

⁷ Stuczynski, ‘Converso Paulinism and Residual Jewishness’, 133.

⁸ Alfonso de Espina, *Fortalitium fidei* (Strasbourg: Johann Mentelin, 1471); Hernando de Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, ed. Ángel Gómez Moreno, Monumenta christiana baetica: Documenta 4 (Granada: Nuevo Inicio, 2019).

⁹ An expression coined by Eloy Benito Ruano, *Los orígenes del problema converso*, rev. edn. (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2001).

¹⁰ On Espina’s text and career, see Rosa Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania: Jews and Conversos in Alonso de Espina’s Fortalitium Fidei*, Medium Aevum Monographs 31 (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2013); Costanza Cavallero, *Los enemigos del fin del mundo: judíos, herejes y demonios en el*

nor the upper echelons of the Church paid heed to Espina in the early 1460s, by the time Talavera composed his *Católica impugnación* the situation had changed radically. Writing at the behest of the Catholic Monarchs in the months before the Spanish Inquisition first began its activities, Talavera directed his work at a specific instance of heresy in Seville.¹¹

In what follows, I analyse the ideas of Espina and Talvera under three headings. First, their invocation of the Apostolic Age and the significance they believed that it held for fifteenth-century Castile. Second, their vision of the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ and the implications that this had for their understanding of contemporary *converso* religiosity. Third, the authors' responses -usually implicit- to *converso* Paulinism as typified by such writers as Pablo de Santamaría, Alonso de Cartagena, and Juan de Torquemada.

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Espina found in the Letters of Saint Paul the image of a Church under siege; the mirror, as he saw it, of his own age. Everywhere he looked, Espina perceived the enemies of the faith assailing the Christian fortress: heretics, Jews, Muslims, demons, and witches.¹² *Conversos* occupied a complex place in Espina's analysis; they were at once heretics, persisting obdurately in error, but this heresy stemmed from a recidivist embrace of Judaism. Having received the sacrament of baptism, *conversos* turned their backs on it: they sought to live like Jews, observing the Law of Moses and denying the tenets of Christianity. Espina described, under two main headings -the practice of circumcision and the denial of the

Fortalitium fidei de Alonso de Espina (Castilla, siglo XV) (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2016).

¹¹ Talavera's work and career: Isabella Iannuzzi, *Convencer para convertir: la Católica Impugnación de fray Hernando de Talavera*, Monumenta christiana baetica: Monografías y suplementos 1 (Granada: Nuevo Inicio, 2019); Bert Carlstrom, 'Shepherding the Stranger: Pastoral Care of New Christians in Fifteenth-Century Castile' (PhD, London, Queen Mary, University of London, 2021).

¹² Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols 9r-10r. On the enemies of the faith in *Fortalitium fidei*, Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 73-79.

Gospel- a wide catalogue of rituals and behaviours engaged in by New Christians that he associated with the observance of Mosaic Law.¹³ *Conversos* were, ultimately, ‘secret Jews’, and all of Espina’s statements concerning Jews and Judaism applied equally to them.¹⁴

The beleaguered Church of Espina’s time was not unique in its plight. The history of the Church was, in essence, one of constant struggle. From the earliest days of the Apostolic Age it had been besieged by its enemies and it would find peace only after the Second Coming.¹⁵ While the Church, built on the foundation of Christ, was invincible, its individual members were vulnerable. The first attacks had come from the Jews.¹⁶ Having failed in their public denunciations of the Apostles, the Jews sought instead to undermine the Church from within, falsely accepting baptism and demanding the observance of the Law of Moses.¹⁷ Espina turned to the language of St Paul to describe these enemies: they were ‘false apostles and deceitful workmen’.¹⁸ Drawing on Acts 15.10, Espina then described those who tried to ‘put an iron yoke upon the necks of the Gentiles which neither they themselves nor their fathers [i.e. the Jews] had been able to bear’, arguing they sought to bring down the nascent Church.¹⁹ Espina’s use of Acts 15 here was not incidental or unthinking. It introduced, albeit implicitly, the problem of circumcision and its status as a marker of heterodox belief. Acts 15 recounts the events of the so-called Council of Jerusalem, a meeting of the Apostolic Church that established Gentile converts to Christianity were not required to observe the totality of Mosaic Law and, crucially, were not to undergo circumcision.²⁰ As Espina saw it, the dissensions that had been settled in

¹³ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, discussion of circumcision: fols 50v-55r; denial of the Gospel of Christ: fols 55r-56v.

¹⁴ Espina, fol. 151v: ‘cum multi christiani facti sunt iudei, uel melius dicam erant occulti iudei’.

¹⁵ Espina, fols 14r, 239v.

¹⁶ Espina, fols 14r-15r.

¹⁷ Espina, fol. 15r: ‘recepunt ficte bautismum’.

¹⁸ Espina, fol. 15r: ‘Hoc uocat scriptura pseudo apostolos siue decepcionis apostolos’. Cf. 2 Corinthians 11.13.

¹⁹ Espina, fol. 15r: ‘cuius iugum ferre non potuerunt nec ipsi nec patres eorum’.

²⁰ On disputes in the Apostolic Church between Jews and Gentiles about the obligation of Christians to observe Mosaic Law, see Joseph H. Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40-41, 49-50.

first-century Jerusalem were once again threatening the Church. The *conversos* with their recalcitrant observance of the Mosaic Law were the party of the circumcision.

The problem of circumcision is one of the main threads running through Espina's discussions of Jews and *conversos*. For Espina, circumcision was both a physical ritual and a marker of interior disposition.²¹ The supposed prevalence of the practice amongst Castilian *conversos* was a sign of their continuing, calculated embrace of Judaism and their attendant animus towards the Christian faith and the Christian faithful. Espina drew validation for his position from the Letters of Saint Paul.²² In an extended engagement with Pauline metaphors of freedom and servitude, deriving from the Epistle to the Galatians (4. 22-31), Espina argued that *converso* circumcision was a rejection of the citizenship of the kingdom of Heaven. The Christian who underwent circumcision placed himself under servitude, under the yoke of the Mosaic Law, and willingly relinquished the freedom brought through Christ's Passion. Moreover, drawing on the *Glossa ordinaria*, Espina added that freedom in this sense meant freedom from servitude to sin as well as membership of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The circumcised fell back under the dominion of sin and of the Mosaic Law, turning their backs on salvation and on the promise of the Kingdom.²³ In doing so, they surrendered their place within Espina's fortress of faith and cast themselves out of the Christian community.²⁴

²¹ On the role of circumcision in medieval literary culture see A. W. Strouse, *Form and Foreskin: Medieval Narratives of Circumcision* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021).

²² On circumcision in the Epistles of Saint Paul, see Nina E. Livesey, *Circumcision as a Malleable Symbol*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament*. 2. Reihe 295 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 77-120.

²³ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols 50v-51r.

²⁴ On the allegory of the fortress of faith, see Rosa Vidal Doval, 'El muro en el Oeste y la *Fortaleza de la fe*: Alegorías de la exclusión de minorías en la Castilla del siglo XV', in *Las metamorfosis de la alegoría: Discurso y sociedad en la Península Ibérica desde la Edad Media hasta la Edad Contemporánea*, ed. Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida and Rosa Vidal Doval (Madrid, Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana, Vervuert, 2005), 143-68.

Therefore, circumcision was, necessarily, the external sign of an interior disposition. Given to Abraham as a sign of the coming of the Messiah, with the arrival of Christ the validity and purpose of circumcision had, in Espina's view, ceased and it had become abhorrent to God.²⁵

As Paul had warned, in Christ neither circumcision nor the foreskin had any value (Galatians 5.6) and neither could, by itself, bring about salvation; this could only come from faith in Christ. Espina cited the *Glossa* to explain that the faith had to be accompanied by charity and love. Those who practiced this empty, fleshly ritual in the hope of salvation were, in effect, denying that Christ was the Messiah and were also rejecting the fundamental values of Christian life –faith and good works.²⁶ Castilian *conversos* were, according to Espina, greater heretics than the Cretans that Paul had censured so strongly in his Epistle to Titus.²⁷ He expanded on the Pauline text and accused *conversos* of being:

disobedient, vain talkers, seducers, subverters of whole houses, teachers of things which they ought not, liars, cruel, gluttons, not healthy in their faith, listeners of Jewish fables, turning away from the truth, professing that they know God, deniers [of God] in their acts, abominable and incredulous, and reprobate to every good work.²⁸

Their faithlessness, cruelty, and dishonesty were the direct and inescapable consequence of the practice of circumcision. For Espina,

²⁵ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols 17v, 20v (validity and purpose of circumcision), 23r (abhorrent to God), 51r (a greater error in a Christian than in a Jew).

²⁶ Espina, fol. 50v: 'Et iterum Ad Galathas 5: "In Christo Ihesu neque circumcisio aliquid valet neque prepuccium sed fides que per dilectionem operatur" super quo dicit *Glossa*, "fides non utique ociosa, quia fides sine operibus non saluat." Sed que operatur per caritatem dicitur et proprium opus fidei dilectio est, sine dilectione fides inanis est, fides cum dilectione christiani est.'

²⁷ For a discussion of later uses of this passage of the Epistle to Titus, see Stuczynski, 'Converso Paulinism and Residual Jewishness', 123.

²⁸ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fol. 51v: 'enumerat xv condiciones pessimas scilicet quod sunt inobedientes, vaniloqui, seductores, vniuersos domos subuertentes, docentes que non oportet, mendaces, crudeles, gulosi, non sani in fide, intendentes iudaicis fabulis, auertentes se a veritate, confitententes se nosse deum, factis negantes, abhominabiles incredibiles, ad omne opus bonum reprobi'.

circumcised *conversos* were worse than devils, ‘a raging plague’ that sought to destroy the faith of Christ.²⁹

These were not abstract discussions for Espina: he was clear that circumcision was widespread and ongoing amongst New Christians. He detailed a series of examples of clandestine circumcisions to reveal the extent of the practice. On the basis of these examples, Espina concluded that *conversos* were turning their backs on Christianity and joining the ranks of the Jews every day. Families practiced infant circumcisions, bringing children up within heretical communities. Parents would attempt to hide the ritual such as the woman in Zamora who claimed her sons had suffered accidents that had required the surgical removal of their foreskins.³⁰ Meanwhile, adults were also undergoing this ritual. Espina discussed the case of a group in Medina del Campo who had been hiding while recovering from their wounds. At least one individual had intended to travel to Jerusalem live openly as a Jew.³¹

What of Espina’s engagement with *converso* Paulinism? On the face of it, *Fortalitium fidei* was not offering a contribution to an ongoing debate: Espina does not cite opponents by name or even acknowledge the existence of differing standpoints.³² Despite this, it is clear that he challenges many of the claims made by *converso* Paulinism. In particular, Espina discusses the place of Jews and Judaism within salvation history, offering an almost resolutely negative interpretation.

Authors such as Santamaría, Cartagena, and Torquemada had claimed that Jews had been and remained central to this history.³³ As Stuczynski argues, Santamaría and Cartagena had shown how ‘at the beginning of

²⁹ Espina, fols 50v-51r (worse than devils), 53v (as a plague): ‘Ideo cum hec pestis rabida conetur ex toto subuertere legem Christi’. On the association between *conversos*, Jews, and demons see Cavallero, *Los enemigos del fin del mundo*, 328–37.

³⁰ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fol. 51v.

³¹ Espina, fol. 51v. On the same episode, see also fol. 55r.

³² Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 33–34, 72. Espina was familiar with the works of Santamaría, citing the *Scrutinium scripturarum* approvingly a number of times, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols 82v, 83r.

³³ Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 53–64.

God's election, at the foundation of the Church [...] and throughout human history, the role of the Jews remained central'.³⁴ Espina took a diametrically opposed view. Any positive role played by Jews had been episodic, bound by time and place. The Mosaic Law, Espina argued, was limited to a people, the Jews, a place, the Promised Land, and a time, that before the coming of the Messiah. The imperfect Law of Moses had served the purpose of preparing the people of Israel for the Incarnation, but with the coming of Christ its validity had lapsed.³⁵ Even when its observance had been demanded of Jews, the Law of Moses was imperfect in its morality and limited in its gifts –it offered an incomplete understanding of God and could not bestow grace or forgiveness.³⁶ The contrast with the Law of Christ was telling: this was an older, eternal covenant with God, resting on the firmest foundations of faith, perfect in its origin and commands, and offering the only path to salvation.³⁷ Espina likewise restricted the positive role played by Jews at the end of time, devoting less attention to their ultimate conversion and more to their place alongside Antichrist. In Espina's narrative of the Apocalypse, Antichrist would arise and release the ten lost tribes from their abode in the Caspian Mountains; he would then proceed to Jerusalem, gathering a following of Jews on his journey. In Jerusalem, he would circumcise himself and claim to be the Messiah, deceiving many Jews as well as Christians. Antichrist's deception would be uncovered by the preaching of Enoch and Elijah and many Jews, finally aware of their error, would convert to Christianity. In the tribulation that follows, many of these converts would be killed alongside the Jews remaining in Jerusalem. The death of Antichrist at the hands of the Archangel Michael would mark the final confirmation of the conversion of the Jews.³⁸ Even this final conversion could be minimised in Espina's thinking. Following Duns

³⁴ Stuczynski, 'From Polemics and Apologetics to Theology and Politics', 262.

³⁵ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fol. 37v.

³⁶ Espina, fols 37v, 38r, 42r.

³⁷ On the perfection of the Law of Christ, Espina, fols 37v-42v.

³⁸ Espina, fols 154v-156v; on Espina's apocalyptic thought see Steven J. McMichael, 'The End of the World, Antichrist, and the Final Conversion of the Jews in the *Fortalitium Fidei* of Friar Alonso de Espina (d. 1464)', *Medieval Encounters* 12, no. 2 (2006): 224-73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006706778884916>; and Cavallero, *Los enemigos del fin del mundo*, 146-48, 308-13.

Scotus, Espina observed that all that was needed for the fulfilment of biblical prophecies concerning the ultimate conversion of the Jews was that a small remnant of them survived on ‘some island’ somewhere. Prophecies were no mandate for the widespread presence of Jews within Christian society.³⁹

Between the Coming of Christ and the end of time, Espina allowed no positive role to Jews and Judaism. The ongoing part that they played in the history of salvation was a wholly negative one. They had ceased to be God’s people and all that awaited them, as the consequence of their unbelief, was eternal damnation.⁴⁰ From the time of their rejection and murder of Christ, they had continued to attack the faith and the faithful at every turn.⁴¹ The repeated attempts by Jews to disprove the main articles of the Christian faith were necessarily futile but their physical attacks on Christians were capable of causing great harm.⁴² In offering a chronological catalogue of these cruelties, stretching from the Apostolic Age to his present, Espina underlined the enduring hatred of Jews for Christians and emphasised that contemporary attacks were the same as those of earlier times.⁴³ This continuing and repeating Jewish enmity manifested itself in Castile also in the figure of the heretical *converso*. Espina’s adaptation of Paul’s language in the Epistle to Titus 1.10–16 to describe New Christians served to emphasise that *conversos* were guilty of the same crimes as their Jewish forebears of the first century and were but one more part of the ongoing assault on the faith.⁴⁴

³⁹ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols 153v–154r: ‘aliqua insula’; Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 113–14.

⁴⁰ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fol. 46v.

⁴¹ Espina, fol. 122r–v. These notions stand in stark contrast with Pablo de Santamaría’s understanding of the essential and enduring role of Jews and converts from Judaism in Christian salvation history; Jeremy Cohen, *The Salvation of Israel: Jews in Christian Eschatology from Paul to the Puritans*, *Medieval Societies, Religions, and Cultures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 187–99.

⁴² Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fols. 73v–122r.

⁴³ Espina, fols. 122v–129v; Alisa Meyuhás Ginio, *La forteresse de la foi: la vision du monde d’Alonso de Espina, moine espagnol (?-1466)*, trans. Zvi Rabi (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 60–61.

⁴⁴ For Cartagena and Torquemada’s reading of this passage, see Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 42–44.

Did Judaism have anything positive to offer Christianity in the present age? *Converso* Paulinism suggested some continuing utility; Santamaría, for example, had stressed the value of rabbinical sources in understanding the Old Testament and Christian theology.⁴⁵ Espina's answer, by contrast, was in the negative. He noted the Talmud contained an account of the shameful descent of the Jews, the product of intercourse between Adam, the animals, and the demon Lilith. Their brethren were thus monsters and demons and their stepmothers the ass and the sow. Espina accepted that such kinship was physically impossible but, nonetheless, he claimed the Jews shared in this monstrous heritage on account of their belief in such ideas.⁴⁶ Believing in the value of post-Biblical Jewish writings, in the 'Jewish fables' of the Epistle to Titus, meant wilfully and perversely partaking in this shameful and damaged genealogy.⁴⁷

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'There arose in our time another Ebion, [...] and he wrote as if these things had not been condemned already: that some rites from Mosaic Law ought to be or can be observed alongside the Holy Gospel.'⁴⁸ Thus Hernando de Talavera's *Católica impugnación* described the heresy that had sprung up among *conversos* in Seville.⁴⁹ Talavera had first engaged with this heresy when leading a campaign of religious instruction in the city instigated by the Catholic Monarchs in the late 1470s. The campaign was a failure: preaching met with resistance and legislation proved ineffective. In 1480, an anonymous text attacking Talavera's efforts circulated in Seville. The *Católica impugnación*, written at the behest of

⁴⁵ Yossi Yisraeli, "'Fides ex auditu, as your Rabbis often Say": A New Perspective on Paul in the Fifteenth Century', in this volume. See also, Stuczynski, 'Converso Paulinism and Residual Jewishness', 113.

⁴⁶ Espina, *Fortalitium fidei*, fol. 73r.

⁴⁷ Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 100.

⁴⁸ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 48: 'levántose agora en nuestro tiempo otro Ebión, [...] y escribió commo si no fuera ya reprobado aquesto: que se deven o pueden guardar algunas cerimonias de la Ley Mosaica con el Sancto Evangelio'.

⁴⁹ Talavera, 44-45: 'the newly converted [...] to observe Jewish rites and ceremonies' (los nuevamente convertidos [...] de observar ritos y cerimonias judaicas).

Isabel I of Castile, was Talavera's response to this tract – to the 'herético libelo' or 'heretical pamphlet' as he called it.⁵⁰ The pamphlet itself is no longer extant and the *Católica impugnación* remains the only guide to its contents.⁵¹

As Espina had done a generation before, Talavera turned to the Apostolic Age to understand the present conflicts within the Church. For Talavera the author of the pamphlet was a new Ebion and his outlook and doctrine matched those of heretical movements of the early Church – 'chirintians, [...] Nazarenes, [...] and ebionites' – which had maintained Christians ought to practice circumcision and observe the Law of Moses.⁵² That these heresies had been defeated by the preaching of the Apostles and condemned in the Letters of Saint Paul confirmed Ecclesiastes' aphorism that there is nothing new under the sun and further showed the ignorance of the anonymous author who sought to promote them anew.⁵³

Talavera's appeal to the Apostolic Age may have been a response to the anonymous author's invocation of the Early Church. The author had apparently appealed to the Council of Jerusalem to justify his opposition to an ordinance, promulgated by Talavera, which made compulsory the use of sacred images for domestic devotion.⁵⁴ Exactly what point the author was making is unclear from Talavera's account – he prefers to focus on his opponent's supposed intellectual shortcomings – but it does seem as if the intention was to present the judgements of the Council as

⁵⁰ The name given to the heretical text appears in the main title and prologue of the *Católica impugnación*, Talavera, 30, 44; Francisco Márquez Villanueva, 'Ideas de la *Católica impugnación* de fray Hernando de Talavera', in *De la España judeoconversa: doce estudios*, Serie General universitaria 57 (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2006), 230–31.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the limitations of any attempt to reconstruct the 'libelo' see Carlstrom, 'Shepherding the Stranger: Pastoral Care of New Christians in Fifteenth-Century Castile', 80–83.

⁵² Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 46–47: 'chirintianos, [...] nazareos [...] ebionitas'.

⁵³ Talavera, 46–47.

⁵⁴ On the dispute about the devotional use of images see Felipe Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia: política y poética de la imagen sagrada en la España del cuatrocientos* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2007), 54–55; on the author as a reformer in the same vein as contemporaries elsewhere in Europe see Carlstrom, 'Shepherding the Stranger: Pastoral Care of New Christians in Fifteenth-Century Castile', 83–85.

the literal and exclusive blueprint for Christian life.⁵⁵ If Talavera was responding to his opponent's claim, nevertheless his recourse to comparisons with the Apostolic Age served a polemical purpose. By invoking the figure of Ebion, Talavera asserted that the anonymous author's understanding of the Christian life could not be anything other than one more example of judaizing heresy.⁵⁶ Again, as Espina had done before him, Talavera characterised his opponent as trying to reopen long-settled –indeed, spurious– debates.

For the anonymous author, however, the debates were neither settled nor spurious. For him, the Law of Christ had not superseded the Law of Moses. Instead, he believed that the proper observance of Christianity demanded the keeping of Mosaic Law. To venerate saints and to use devotional images was to indulge in idolatrous practices of gentile origin; to reject them, as mandated by the Law of Moses, was to practice a more perfect Christianity.⁵⁷ When *conversos* refused this idolatry, they were neither judaizers nor heretics but were instead 'better and more complete Christians'.⁵⁸ In essence, the *Católica impugnación* was the

⁵⁵ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 221–225. Talavera's discussion of the Council of Jerusalem is typical of how he renders the arguments of the anonymous author: 'he [the anonymous author] compounds his earlier error [i.e. that Peter and James were in Rome at the time of this dispute] and says that Saint James contradicted Saint Peter on the matter of the circumcision of the Gentiles and that Saint Paul reconciled them. But, in the text of the Acts of the Apostles that this wicked man brought forward, it does not say that the argument was between Saint Peter and Saint Paul, rather that some converts from Judaism came from Judea to Antioch and there they argued against Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas claiming that those who converted to the holy catholic faith of Jesus Christ from gentility had to undergo circumcision; and that Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem to [discuss] these arguments and questions with Saint Peter and James and the other disciples. (Añade en su yerro y dize que Santiago contradixo a sant Pedro la circuncisión de los gentiles y que sant Pablo los concordó, y no hay tal cosa, mas entre sant Pedro y sant Pablo fue alguna piadosa altercación cerca de ello, commo lo cuenta el mesmo sant Pablo *ad Galatas*. Y aun en la istoria del libro de los Actos que este malvado allegó no dize que la altercación fuesse entre santo Pedro y sant Pablo, mas que algunos convertidos del judaísmo vinieron de Judea en Antioquía y allí porfiavan contra sant Pablo y sant Bernabé que devían ser circuncidados todos los que de la gentilidad se convertían a la sancta fee cathólica de Jesuchristo; y que, sobre esta altercación y cuestión, vinieron en Hierusalem Paulus y Barnabás a sant Pedro y a Santiago y a los otros discípulos. , p. 223). Cf Acts of the Apostles 15 and Epistle to the Galatians 2.

⁵⁶ On the concept of judaizing, see Francisco Márquez Villanueva, 'Sobre el concepto de judaizante', in *De la España judeoconversa: doce estudios*, Serie General universitaria 57 (Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2006), 95–114.

⁵⁷ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 209.

⁵⁸ Talavera, 110: 'mejores y más complidos christianos'.

refutation of these ideas. Drawing on the Letters of Paul, Talavera asserted the incompatibility of Judaism and Christianity and argued that the coming of Christ had freed the Jews from observance of the Law of Moses.⁵⁹ In the Prologue, Talavera cited the Epistles to the Galatians and the Colossians, stating that Paul ‘reprehends and rejects openly circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath, and of the other feasts mandated by the Mosaic Law, and the observance of the foods, and drinks, and all ceremonies, with their observances and judgements’.⁶⁰ Talavera’s text is, effectively, an extended gloss on these words.

Though Talavera was clear that the Law of Christ had superseded the Law of Moses, he did not write of a simple replacement. Christ’s Law perfected the Law of Moses: it was based on the love of a father and not the fear of a serf, afforded salvation rather than earthly rewards, and was written in the hearts of all the faithful rather than the stone tablets of the Jews.⁶¹ Building on the Pauline dictum that ‘Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes’ (Romans 10.4), Talavera presented Christ as the root and foundation of the Law of Moses. What was implicit and hidden had become explicit and manifest in the Gospel.⁶²

Even if the Law of Moses was now ‘harmful and not helpful’, it has been given ‘rest and leisure’ among Christians who honour it as they would an elderly and beloved parent. In this way, those who converted to Christianity from Judaism did not lose their Law but simply ceased to observe it.⁶³

⁵⁹ Talavera, 104, 117-18.

⁶⁰ Talavera, 49: ‘the Apostle Saint Paul said, as it has been noted above in his epistles, notably ad Galathas and ad Colossenses, where he reprehends and rejects openly circumcision, the keeping of the sabbath, and of the other feasts mandated by the Mosaic Law, and the observance of the foods, and drinks, and all ceremonies, with their observances and judgements’ (el Apóstol sant Pablo dixo, como arriba fue apuntado en sus epístolas, señaladamente ad Galathas y ad Colossenses, donde reprehende y defiende muy abiertamente la circuncisión, la guarda del sábado y de las otras fiestas mandadas en la Ley Mosaica, y la observancia de las viandas y de los beveres y las otras cerimonias todas, con sus observancias y juizios).

⁶¹ Talavera, 72-82 for the most extensive discussion of the relationship between both Laws.

⁶² Talavera, 57-58.

Nevertheless, a Christian who observed Mosaic Law committed a grave sin, for in doing so they rejected Christ, and they would be cast into darkness, away from the ‘service, love, and knowledge of God’.⁶⁴ Indeed, the culpability of a Christian observing Mosaic Law was greater than that of a Jew. Implicit in the sacrament of baptism was the promise not to keep the Law of Moses; a Jew had made no such promise.⁶⁵ More than this, a true baptism –that is, one sincerely received– afforded spiritual illumination on the practice of the Law through the gift of the faith and the teachings of the Church.⁶⁶ Though not stated directly, Talavera implies that those Christians who insisted on continuing to observe the Law of Moses were insincere in their faith, that they had feigned baptism.⁶⁷ Talavera, however, was careful to distinguish different degrees of culpability among judaizers, each worthy of different penalties under Canon Law. Those who believed that the Law of Moses ought to be observed alongside the Law of Christ were heretics; those who had entirely abandoned Christianity and ‘deliberately, believe, follow, and keep’ the Laws of Moses or Muhamad were apostates.⁶⁸ In contrast, Jews and Muslims did not sin in keeping their respective Laws and trying to prevent them from doing so would amount to a forced conversion, which was entirely illicit.⁶⁹

Alongside dangers to the individual Christian, Talavera saw also in the ‘heretical pamphlet’ a threat to the unity of the body of the faithful.

⁶³ Talavera, 211-12: ‘dannosa y no provechosa’, ‘perfección, descanso y holganza; como los padres cuando ya son viejos’.

⁶⁴ Talavera, 214-15: ‘apartan del servicio y amor de Nuestro Señor, mas aún de todo conocimiento de Él’, cf. Galatians 5.6.

⁶⁵ Talavera, 194: ‘prometió en el sancto bautismo, aunque *implicite*, de no las guardar’.

⁶⁶ Talavera, 194; For a comprehensive discussion of fictive baptism, see Marcia L. Colish, *Faith, Fiction and Force in Medieval Baptismal Debates* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

⁶⁷ On Talavera’s idea of conversion in the text, see Davide Scotto, ‘“Neither through Habits, nor Solely through Will, but through Infused Faith”: Hernando de Talavera’s Understanding of Conversion’, in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, *Numen* 164 (Brill, 2020), 291-327, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416826_013.

⁶⁸ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 213.

⁶⁹ Talavera, 195, but note the comment that, after the abrogation of the Law, even its observance by Jews is a sin, 139.

Though now only imperfectly perceptible through Talavera's critique, the anonymous author seems to have drawn on notions associated with *converso* Paulinism. In his pamphlet, the author looks to have asserted that Christians of Jewish origin were superior to those of Gentile origin. According to Talavera, the author had claimed that *conversos* were by nature 'wise people of subtle wit' and thus avoided falling into idolatry.⁷⁰ He had similarly argued that Christians of gentile origin did not adhere fully to the teaching of the Gospels and 'did not deserve the name of Christians [...] because they do not keep His doctrine.'⁷¹ For Talavera, claims of this type amounted to an endorsement of the gravest of errors, seeking to create a division in the faithful where there was none.⁷² The anonymous author was undoing Christ's work, separating those who had been joined into one people. As Paul had shown, 'there ought to be no distinction between Greek and Jew, between circumcision and prepuce, between foreign and native, on the day all are baptised.'⁷³ The anonymous author had thus been entirely misguided when he claimed that the times of 'one law, one flock, and one shepherd were drawing near'.⁷⁴ Such times had already arrived with Christ and there was only one Christian people, joined in one faith and one law, and with one set of sacraments and commandments.⁷⁵

Where or from whom the anonymous author had taken these notions or whether they were his own invention is unknowable. Many of his concepts read like less subtle versions of Cartagena's or Torquemada's *converso* Paulinism. Certainly, there are echoes of ideas about the natural propensity of Jews towards virtues such as goodness and gentleness that was retained after baptism. Likewise, notions that Jews had a particular closeness to the Christian faith and a bodily kinship with

⁷⁰ Talavera, 166: 'gente sabia y de gentil ingenio'.

⁷¹ Talavera, 216: 'no se deven llamar christianos [...], pues no guardan su doctrina'.

⁷² Iannuzzi, *Convencer para convertir*, 75.

⁷³ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 280: 'que no oviesse distinción alguna de griego a judío, de circuncisión a prepucio, de estraño a doméstico, el día que todos son bautizados'.

⁷⁴ Talavera, 283: 'se acerca el tiempo en que será una ley y un corral y un pastor'.

⁷⁵ Talavera, 285.

Christ that placed them at an advantage over gentiles also occur in the pamphlet. The author maintained that, through the Virgin Mary, Christ descended from Jews and, having lived as a Jew, was the first convert to Christianity.⁷⁶ Ideas about the pre-eminence of Christians of Jewish origin within the mystical body of Christ are also present, albeit that the author seems to imagine this will only be fully realised with the coming of the one Law and the one shepherd, when the humble and meek are exalted.⁷⁷

In response to such ideas, Talavera was insistent that there was no virtue or iniquity attached to the descent of Christians: what mattered was belief in redemption through Christ. Nevertheless, Talavera had to counter the specific ideas of the anonymous author. To do so, he strenuously denied Christ's Jewishness both in terms of his lineage and his religious identity: Christ had been neither Jew nor gentile because he had no human lineage, likewise he had not kept the totality of the Law.⁷⁸ He had fulfilled God's promise to the Jews but they had rejected Him, while the gentiles had believed, making themselves worthy of redemption. Faith in Christ was the cause of the humbling of the Jews and the exalting of the gentiles; such faith was the only true measure of the worth of any individual Christian.⁷⁹ Through their rejection of Christ, the Jews had surrendered their previous pre-eminence: severed from a productive trunk, they had become dried branches that could not bear fruit. By contrast, good Christians were the fruitful branches grafted onto the good trunk, even if some descended from bad trunks and stones of gentility.⁸⁰ In essence, Talavera rejected the possibility of ethnic hierarchies within the body of the faithful, insisting upon the regenerative value of baptism, when sincerely received, to produce

⁷⁶ Talavera, 70–71.

⁷⁷ Talavera, 283; on the ideas of *converso* Paulinism explored in this paragraph, see Stuczynski, 'Converso Paulinism and Residual Jewishness', 118–24.

⁷⁸ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 69–72: 'He was neither Jew, nor Gentile, for from any other human lineage according to the flesh, because lineage usually comes from the father and Jesus Christ did not have a human father, but instead was conceived by the Holy Ghost' (no fue judío, ni gentil, ni de otro linage humano segund la carne, porque el linage comúnmente se trae del padre y Jhesuchristo no le tovo cuanto a la humanidad, mas fue concebido de Spíritu Sancto).

⁷⁹ Talavera, 286–87.

⁸⁰ Talavera, 162, cf. Romans 10.16–21.

entirely new creatures. *Conversos* had to be integrated into the main Christian fold, abandoning any notions of distinctiveness or superiority.

Despite such insistence, there remain a number of tensions in Talavera's attitudes toward *conversos*. He devotes considerable space in the *Católica impugnación* to defending *conversos* from accusations of heresy and faithlessness, insisting that individuals had to be judged by their own actions rather than any perceived group identity. Calling all *conversos* heretics was illicit; only those who were found to have observed Mosaic Law could be labelled as such. Likewise, Talavera insisted that the use of pejorative language such as 'marrano or marrantiez' amounted to an offence against Christ.⁸¹ Yet Talavera demanded that *conversos* take special steps to demonstrate their orthodoxy, such as being seen working on Saturdays.⁸² There are similar tensions in Talavera's attitude towards his anonymous opponent. Directly contradicting his own carefully drawn distinction between heretics and apostates, Talavera accuses the author of being 'neither an Old nor New Christian but an obstinate and malicious Jew'.⁸³ While the author had claimed to be an Old Christian with four Christian grandparents, to Talavera he was simply a 'know-nothing Jew'.⁸⁴

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Espina and Talavera often appear in the literature as polar opposites: Espina the archetypal medieval anti-Semite, the rabble-rousing preacher, and harbinger of the Spanish Inquisition, Talvera the moderate, enlightened courtier, the Humanist reformer promoting religious

⁸¹ Talavera, 66-67.

⁸² Talavera, 190; for the importance of acculturation of *conversos* towards the Old Christian majority, see Carlstrom, 'Shepherding the Stranger: Pastoral Care of New Christians in Fifteenth-Century Castile', 160-62.

⁸³ Talavera, *Católica impugnación del herético libelo, maldito y descomulgado*, 56: 'no fuesse christiano viejo ni nuevo, sino obstinado y malicioso judío'.

⁸⁴ Talavera, 287: 'nescio judío'; see also 68-69 where Talavera chastises the author for his many errors.

education and unity.⁸⁵ Certainly, Espina wrote in collective terms of the heresy of New Christians; *conversos*, as a group, were suspect. He was likewise silent on the issue of catechesis and religious instruction and his preaching, as recounted in *Fortalitium fidei* and elsewhere, was incendiary and adversarial.⁸⁶ Talavera, by contrast, was at pains to avoid blanket condemnations of *conversos*, focussing instead on the individual believer and seeking to educate and integrate New Christians through a wider reform of Castilian society.⁸⁷ In doing so, Talavera sought to offer an alternative to the repressive model embodied in the nascent Spanish Inquisition.⁸⁸

Yet a comparison of the works of the two authors shows a surprising degree of consonance. Both invoked the Apostolic Age, with its debates about Christian observances and rituals, to understand and explain *converso* religiosity. Their readings of the Pauline Epistles led them both to conclude that *converso* heterodoxy could most often be understood as judaizing heresy –even if they might disagree about its extent and the appropriate remedies.⁸⁹ This judaizing heresy was clearly conceptually distinct from the kinds of Scriptural interpretations that modern scholars have termed *converso* Paulinism. These readings did not endorse the observance of Mosaic Law by Christians, rather, they positively re-evaluated the place of Jews and Judaism in salvation history. Moreover, no contemporary challenged the religious *bona fides* of Santamaría, Cartagena, or Torquemada. Nevertheless, both Espina and Talavera rejected *converso* Paulinist readings of the Epistles: no positive residue

⁸⁵ For example, see Márquez Villanueva, 'Ideas de la *Católica impugnación* de fray Hernando de Talavera', 136. See also, Francisco Bautista, 'Predicación Anticonversa, Inquisición y Tolerancia En Un Discurso de 1461–1462: En Torno a Alonso de Oropesa y Alonso de Espina', *Medieval Encounters* 28, no. 5 (8 November 2022): 377–446, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700674-12340150>.

⁸⁶ On Espina's preaching, see Vidal Doval, *Misera Hispania*, 22–25.

⁸⁷ Iannuzzi, *Convencer para convertir*, 36.

⁸⁸ Márquez Villanueva, 'Ideas de la *Católica impugnación* de fray Hernando de Talavera', 230–231; Iannuzzi, *Convencer para convertir*, 38–40.

⁸⁹ On the idea of *conversos* as judaizers in general, Márquez Villanueva, 'Sobre el concepto de judaizante', 98, who speaks of the development of an 'a priori identification between the sociological category of *converso* and the religious one of judaizer' (equiparación apriorística entre la categoría sociológica de *converso* y la religiosa de judaizante).

from Judaism was carried over into the life of the convert. Likewise, albeit with differing degrees of virulence, both authors insisted that outside of their apocalyptic role Jews had no positive contribution to make to salvation history after the coming of Christ. While Espina took a more extreme view, seeking to marginalise Jews and Judaism to the greatest extent possible, Talavera nevertheless was not above employing anti-semitic invective to make his arguments. Underlying their assessments was the idea that the valorisation of Jews and Judaism – in whatever form it took – carried a danger to the Christian faithful. For Espina, errant readings of Scripture, particularly those informed by the Talmud, led to the actualisation in the individual of an ignominious and damaged lineage. For Talavera, pride in Jewish ancestry or belief in its superiority rent the seamless unity of the Church. Implicitly and in different ways, both authors assigned *converso* Paulinism and judaizing *conversos* a place on the same continuum.

Comparing Espina and Talavera in this way highlights the limitations of applying labels such as pro- and anti-*converso* to texts and authors. While Espina is seen as a pivotal anti-*converso* figure, Talavera is regarded as a committed defender of New Christians. Yet though the authors may have arrived at very different solutions to the *converso* problem the intellectual underpinnings of their arguments are markedly similar. Such similarities are not restricted to these two authors. As Espina and Talavera had done, other writers –including Talavera’s anonymous opponent– sought to scrutinize *converso* religiosity through the lens of the Apostolic Age. The Early Church was a powerful tool for understanding the circumstances in Castile. Its history offered insight into religious conversion and its aftermath, into the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, and into the strife and confusion that beset the building of a religious community. To appeal to it was to invoke the authority of the Apostles, particularly Saint Paul. In many ways, *converso* Paulinism was responding to similar impulses; it was one particular manifestation of this wider historical engagement. Though this article

has looked specifically at the Apostolic Age, it is clear that the representation of the past more generally was a crucially important intellectual front in debates about the shape of the Christian community in late-medieval Castile – a front that scholarship is only now beginning to explore.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Ryan Szpiech, 'Scrutinizing History: Polemic and Exegesis in Pablo de Santa María's *Siete Edades Del Mundo*', *Medieval Encounters* 16, no. 1 (2010): 96-142, <https://doi.org/10.1163/138078510X12535199002712>; Rosa Vidal Doval, "'Qui Ex Iudeis Sunt': Visigothic Law and the Discrimination against *Conversos* in Late Medieval Spain', in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 60-85, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416826>.