**“All One in Christ Jesus”?:**

**Christian Spiritual Closeness, Genealogical Determinism and the Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Alonso de Espina's *Fortalitium Fidei* (c.1458–1464).[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Abstract:**   
In his Epistle to the Galatians (chapter 3, verse 28), the Apostle Paul formulated a powerful notion of equality between Christians that transcended ethnic divisions (notably between Jews and Gentiles) and advocated the formation of a close-knit community of belief between individual Christians which would serve to create the mystical union of all Christians into a spiritual body with Jesus Christ at its head. Paul’s appeal to the Christian bond has often stood at odds with the rise of racialized anti-Semitism targeting not only Jews but also Christians of Jewish ancestry. This was particularly the case in late-medieval and early modern Spain, long before the rise of scientific racism in the nineteenth century.

Alonso de Espina's vitriolic polemic entitled “The Fortress of Faith” (*Fortalitium Fidei*), written circa 1458-1464, included a ferocious attack both upon Jews and the descendants of converts who were collectively accused of judaizing. His work had an enormous influence upon later anti-Semitic polemics printed in both Spain and Portugal during the early modern period. As such, he has become notorious among modern historians of this period and the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopaedia* remarked that “the unremitting efforts of Spina were devoted to the utter destruction of the Jewish race”. This work analyses the *Fortalitium Fidei* and argues that the significance of Espina's *opus* for the wider history of anti-Jewish texts needs to be revised since, in stark contrast to many anti-*converso* polemicists, he does not seek to undermine the Pauline concept of Christian spiritual closeness by appealing to biological or genealogical determinism. Espina prefers instead to insist on the generalization of *converso* judaizing and the exceptionality of genuine Jewish conversions to Christianity and does not blame the judaizing of *conversos* on the basis of their Jewish ancestry. For Espina, the prospect of a successful religious assimilation of the *conversos* remains a possibility but it is a remote one and one that is contingent upon the implementation of three measures: the establishment of an effective Inquisition to stamp out judaizing, a ruthless campaign of removal of *converso* children from their parents and the expulsion of all unconverted Jews from Castile.

**Keywords:** Propaganda – Anti-Semitism – Spain – Theology – Espina – Conversion

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,*

*there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*.

Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians,

Chapter 3, verse 28 (King James Version)

In his epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul formulated a powerful notion of equality between Christians that transcended ethnic divisions. Paul was concerned with the damaging divisions which separated Jews and Gentiles amongst early Christians during the first decades of the existence of the Christian Church and especially the question of the continued practice of physical circumcision by Christians of Jewish origin. Paul advocated the formation of a close-knit community of belief based on a ‘spiritual circumcision’ and a closeness between individual Christians, irrespective of ethnic or social background that would serve to create the desired mystical union of all Christians into a single spiritual body with Jesus Christ at its head.

Paul’s vision of a Christianity that transcends ethnicity and creates close bonds between Christians of different ethnic, social and gender status has become an accepted canon of Catholicism and most other Christian denominations. In practice, however, numerous attempts have been made to justify and rationalise discrimination between Christians on the basis of ethnicity. The emergence of scientific racism, and its development of a theory of different (and unequal) human ‘races’, from the late eighteenth century onwards was used to justify the colonisation of non-European peoples as well as to create a hierarchy among Christians based on ethnicity.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the case of Jews, as it is well-known, ‘scientific’ anti-Semitism presented Jews as an inferior and alien (yet threatening) ‘racial’ group. Although never officially endorsed by the Catholic Church, ‘racial’ anti-Semitism has also been (and still is) put forward by extreme right-wing conservative Christian thinkers (including members of the clergy) to account for why Jewish converts will never become genuine Christians and to justify conspiracy theories accusing Jewish converts of infiltrating the Catholic Church and seeking to undermine it from within. Such conspiracist claims have, for instance, been made about the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), accusing it of being a ‘*coup d’église*’ orchestrated by judaizing elements within the Catholic Church.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Historians are presently seeking to reappraise the roots of modern ‘scientific’ racism. They are looking beyond ‘modern’ scientific racism to developments that took place during the medieval period and reject the notion of racism as a single monolithic phenomenon with a linear history. Instead, they have argued in favour of the existence of various racialization processes and, consequently, of different ‘racisms’.[[4]](#footnote-4) In this respect, late medieval and early modern Spain and Portugal offer a promising field of research given the emergence of a large population of Jewish converts to Christianity between 1391 and 1498 following a succession of anti-Jewish riots, mass forced conversions, forceful missionary campaigns and, finally, of expulsions of Jews from various parts of the Peninsula. The converts and their descendants – generically known either as *conversos* or ‘new Christians’ – became the object of both widespread suspicion amongst the ‘old Christian’ population (whether right or wrong) that they continued to secretly practice Judaism whilst outwardly pretending to be Christians. Furthermore, these suspicions of religious insincerity were complemented by acute resentment, as *conversos* seized opportunities for social and economic advancement that had hitherto been barred to them as Jews. The social corollary of the mass conversion of Jews was an increased preoccupation with genealogy. As David Nirenberg has convincingly argued, the destabilization caused by the mass conversions caused Christians, Jews and *conversos* to define their identity through lineage and develop a genealogical form of collective memory.

(...) Over the course of little more than a century, previously marginal logics of lineage had moved to the centre of Jewish, *converso*, and Old Christian communal identity and memory in Iberia. This transformation was achieved, not by the implacable migration of ideas from one culture to another, but by the jostling of countless individuals, Jew and Christian, reorienting themselves in the strangely unfamiliar religious landscape that emerged as the flood-waters of baptism receded. The genealogical turn was itself an attempt to conceal this unfamiliarity, this rupture, by establishing new continuities, new links to family, faith, ‘race’, and ‘nation’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Although fifteenth-century (and later on early modern) Iberians and other Europeans lacked a ‘scientific’ or ‘modern’ understanding of the concept of ethnicity and a clear ‘racial’ terminology, they possessed an indisputable understanding of hereditary characteristics and developed a vocabulary associated with them. The legitimating discourse of the aristocracy, for instance, presented itself as a hereditary caste whose superiority was due to its aristocratic descent; their *noblesse de sang* or ‘blue blood’ (*sangre azul*, an expression that supposedly originates in Spain).[[6]](#footnote-6) The term ‘race’ (*raza*) can be found applied to humans in vernacular Castilian (Spanish) as early as 1438 in the satirical work *El Corbacho*: *Reprobación del amor mundane*. Its author, the archpriest of Talavera de la Reina, Alfonso Martínez de Toledo (1398–c.1470), distinguishes men of “good race” (*buena raza*) from those of “vile race and lineage” (*vil raza y linaje*) whose behaviour and interest is determined by their genealogy. It is important to note that, as this particular instance demonstrates, the use of the term *raza* in the fifteenth century was not necessarily related to the *converso* issue and did not always have negative connotations.[[7]](#footnote-7) Nor was *raza* necessarily applied only to humans. The author of the *Libre de la menescalia*, a popular manual on equine rearing and care written in the 1430s, advises horse owners to seek horses with good characteristics in order to breed “a good race or caste of horses”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Later, the terms “nation” (*nación* in Spanish and *nação* in Portuguese) and “caste” (*casta*) were used interchangeably with *raza* to signify the lineage and descent that bound a specific group of individuals together.[[9]](#footnote-9)

It is against this background of an increasing obsession with the lineage or genealogical descent of individuals that a form of anti-Semitism, targeting both Jews and *conversos*, emerged in late medieval and early modern Spain. Religious and ethnic hatred were inextricably melded together through the belief that Judaism was a hereditary trait transmitted by Jews or *conversos* across generations through their impure blood. This form of ‘religious anti-Semitism’ – to use the expression consciously espoused by a number of modern historians[[10]](#footnote-10) – is widely articulated in anti-*converso* propaganda, statutes of *limpieza de sangre* and the conspiracy theories about the *conversos* circulating in the fifteenth century and early modern period. By the middle of the seventeenth century, for example, the bishop of Tarazona and influential churchman Diego de Castejón y Fonseca (1580–1655) espoused such ‘religious anti-Semitism’, arguing unambiguously that Judaism was transmitted through the bodily humours since the “inclinations” (behavioural traits) of *conversos* were “derived from bodily humours: those that we receive from our ancestors and we could receive this venom from any of them”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The Franciscan friar Alonso de Espina is commonly presented as one of the key figures in the development of this ‘religious anti-Semitism’ in the Iberian Peninsula for his authorship of a notorious work entitled *Fortalitium Fidei   
contra iudeos*, *saracenos aliosque christiane fidei* ***inimicos* (“The Fortress of Faith against Jews, Saracens and all other Enemies of the Christian Faith”).** He has become notorious among modern historians of this period and the 1906 *Jewish Encyclopaedia* remarked that “The unremitting efforts of Spina (sic) were devoted to the utter destruction of the Jewish race”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Whilst his work became famous across Europe, little is known about Fray Alonso de Espina. His exact dates of birth and death are not known. A member of the Observant Franciscans and holder of the degree of master of theology, Espina was an Old Christian and not, as used to be claimed, a *converso*.[[13]](#footnote-13) He was the regent of the Franciscan *Studium* in the university town of Salamanca by 1452 and, during the 1450s, enjoyed a degree of influence at the courts of the kings of Castile Juan II and Enrique IV, even preaching a crusading bull against Granada granted by the papacy. The chronicler Fernando de Pulgar describes Espina as an extremely charismatic preacher who could inspire and mobilise large crowds whom he led in processions, carrying an image of Christ and shedding his own blood through self-flagellation.[[14]](#footnote-14) After joining other Franciscans calling for the establishment of an Inquisition in Castile, Espina fell out of royal favour in the early 1460s and probably died around 1466. Whilst an extant manuscript collection of sermons is attributed to Espina, his sole surviving work is the *Fortalitium Fidei*, a religious polemic in which Espina sets out to identify and categorise the four threats that menace the Christian faith: heretics, Jews, Muslims (“Saracens”) and devils. Far from being a short pamphlet, the *Fortalitium Fidei* is a substantial work – indeed the 1494 Nuremberg edition is 289 folios long – and carefully divided into five distinct books which are themselves separated into subsections.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Unlike other polemical works, the primary aim of the *Fortalitium Fidei* was not to educate clergymen about the ‘enemies’ of the Christian faith so that those enemies could be converted but to appeal for the establishment of an Inquisition in Castile. This probably explains why one of the work’s principle objectives is the dissemination of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslims libels and allegations. Espina seeks to establish its credibility by drawling extensively from a remarkable variety of authoritative polemical sources and exemplary stories from earlier centuries. The impact of the *Fortalitium Fidei* upon anti-Semitic propaganda in both the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere in Europe was enormous. The earliest surviving manuscript of the work dates from 1464. Later manuscript copies in both Latin and vernacular French and German are preserved in libraries across Europe whilst at least nine Latin editions were printed in Strasbourg (1471), Basle (1475), Nuremberg (1485 and 1494), Lyon (1487, 1511, 1525 and 1529) and Cambrai (1629).[[16]](#footnote-16) It is worth noting that the 1494 edition printed in Nuremberg appeared only a few years before the expulsion of the Jews from that town in 1499 and this edition was presumably part of a deliberate campaign to seeking to foster anti-Jewish sentiment in the town and its region.[[17]](#footnote-17) Espina’s book became a major source of information for later anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic authors in the Iberian Peninsula. In 1612, for instance, the Spanish Catholic Apologist Pedro Aznar Cardona referred his readers to Alonso de Espina when he presented the expulsions of Jews from across different parts of Europe as a justification for the expulsion of the morisco minority (the descendants of converts from Islam) from Spain in 1609.[[18]](#footnote-18) Amongst the most significant early modern authors to cite Espina liberally in their own anti-Semitic works were the Portuguese Vicente da Costa Mattos in his *Breve discurso contra a heretica perfidia do iudaismo* (Lisbon, 1622) and the Spanish Franciscan Francisco de Torrejoncillo in his highly popular and often-reprinted *Centinela contra Judíos* (first printed in Madrid in 1674). The influence of the *Fortalitium Fidei* extended as far as Eastern Europe, where it was cited by Polish Catholic priests in various anti-Jewish polemical works produced during the early modern period.[[19]](#footnote-19)

It would be a grave mistake to analyse the *Fortalitium Fidei* in isolation and without taking into account both the historical context in which it was created and the immediate circumstances that led Espina to write between 1458 and 1464. This was a period of immense social stress for Castile; anti-*converso* tensions that had been simmering for decades were suddenly released during a revolt by the Old Christian citizens of Toledo in 1449. This revolt, during which the *conversos* were specifically targeted, was sparked by the fiscal demands of the Crown. The rebels sought to establish a racially discriminatory statute of *limpieza de sangre* barring “the descendants of the perverse lineage of the Jews” from positions of power in the town and an apologist for the rebels, the *Bachiller* Marcos García de Mora, vigorously defended the statute in a manuscript proclamation by arguing that converts descended from Jews were “naturally” (*naturalmente*) inclined to heresy, sinfulness and bad habits.[[20]](#footnote-20) The revolt was swiftly put down by the Crown and the Toledan statute of *limpieza de sangre* was abrogated by the Crown and sternly condemned by the Pope Nicolas V, who referred to Paul’s call for unity and threatened severe punishments against the supporters of anti-*converso* discrimination in the bull *Humani Generis Inimicus*.[[21]](#footnote-21) In spite of this strong initial response, the debate over the legitimacy of anti-*converso* discrimination did not end. The Crown’s failure to follow a consistent policy (Juan II ratified the village of Espinosa de los Monteros’ exclusion of *conversos* in 1452, for example) and an unsuccessful attempt to establish an Inquisition under royal control in 1461-2 failed to appease the rampant tensions in Castile.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The rebellion of 1449 marks the starting point of a vicious controversy about the legitimacy of ethnic discrimination amongst Christians in Spain not only during the following decades but also in the following two centuries. Beyond the papal bull of Nicholas V, the 1449 statutes were condemned by many theologians in the immediate aftermath of the revolt. These critics in the 1440s and 1450s included some of the most prominent theologians and churchmen in Castile. The defenders of the *conversos* included the respected jurist Alonso Díaz de Montalvo (1405–1499), the *converso* bishop of Burgos Alonso de Cartagena (1384–1456), who wrote a defence of Christian unity entitled *Defensorium unitatis christianae* (1449) and strenuously asserted that the grace conferred by baptism upon neophytes was not an inherited virtue, as well as the *converso* Cardinal Juan de Torquemada (1388–1468), who wrote the *Tractatus contra madianitas et ismaelitas* (1450).Finally, and slightly later, another critic of such racialism was the *converso* head of the Hieronymite Order, Alonso de Oropesa, whose work *Lumen ad revelationem gentium* (“Light to enlighten the Gentiles”, 1466) similarly called for unity.[[23]](#footnote-23) The pervasiveness of the belief that genealogical descent impacted upon the character of individuals was nonetheless so well entrenched in fifteenth-century Castile that even a trenchant critic of racialism like Bishop Alonso de Cartagena was, somewhat paradoxically, willing to accept that *conversos* of Jewish origin possessed a moral nobility (compared to ‘Old Christians’) conferred upon them by their Jewish ancestry.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The debate between opponents and proponents of discrimination against *conversos* was a particularly fierce one with particularly high stakes as both sides accused the other of propounding heretical notions. Just as many Old Christians accused the *conversos* of being heretical judaizers, so the defenders of the *conversos* followed a similar tactic, accusing their critics of seeking to divide the Christian community in Castile. Alonso de Cartagena pointed out that the grace of baptism was not an inherited one, thus undermining the argument that tied the probity of Christian beliefs to a genealogy free from Jewish ancestry. Furthermore, both Torquemada and Cartagena offered an alternative reading of Paul attacks upon circumcised Christians in his epistle to Titus (Titus, 1, verses 10-14), arguing that Paul was rejecting those who wished to divide the Church (as they accused anti-*converso* polemicists of doing) rather than actually opposing judaizing Christians of Jewish descent (the more literal interpretation favoured by polemicists such as the Bachiller Marcos García de Mora).

Given the influence of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, it is hardly surprising that both Alonso de Espina and his work have been the subject of a number of recent studies. Steven McMichael and Alisa Meyuhas Ginio have examined the contents of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, focusing particularly on the anti-Jewish subject matter in book three, whilst Ana María Echevarría Arsuaga has analysed the anti-Muslim polemic in book four.[[25]](#footnote-25) More recently, in a timely and persuasive re-examination of how Alonso de Espina presents the Jews and *conversos*, Rosa Vidal Doval argues that his *Fortalitium Fidei* should be understood not as a religious polemic or millenarian work but rather as a sermon-like manifesto promoting a programme of reform that is “at its heart exclusionary” as well as the labour of a man who strenuously advocates “a belligerent and uncompromising unity that functioned through repression and exclusion”.[[26]](#footnote-26) This work adds to the existing scholarship on the *Fortalitium Fidei* by examining Alonso de Espina’s actual place in the development of a proto-racial anti-Semitism revolving around genealogical determinism. At its heart are the following two questions: Does Alonso de Espina actually espouse and expound the proto-racial ideas of the Toledan rebels? Does he perceive the *conversos* to be unredeemable heretics, condemned to judaize by their Jewish ‘blood’? After carefully examining the sections of the *Fortalitium Fidei* in which Espina discusses the conversion of Jews and the errors of judaizing *conversos*, this works argues that Espina’s understanding of the ‘*converso* problem’ affecting Castile is complex but does not depart from standard theological positions on the efficacy of baptism in the conversion of Jews to Christianity. Although highly sceptical of the sincerity of the *conversos* and enthusiastically portraying them collectively as judaizers, Espina is nevertheless not a proponent of racialism. Whilst he energetically calls for his allegorical Christian fortress to be cleansed of all forms of spiritual impurity and religious heterogeneity, he never advocates in favour of cleansing it of Jewish ‘blood’ or otherwise discriminating against the *conversos* on the sole basis of their ancestry.

**Alonso de Espina and the Generalizing of *Converso* Judaizing**

With the benefit of hindsight, and especially considering the subsequent rise of the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* in early modern Spain and their endorsement by the Spanish Crown (such as King Philip II’s critical support for the introduction of discriminatory statutes in the chapter of Toledo Cathedral in the 1540s and 1550s), it would be easy to read the attack on the Jews and *conversos* in the *Fortalitium Fidei* as an expression of a dominant and widespread racialised anti-Semitic sentiment in Castilian/Spanish society. Yet such a perception is far too facile, at least with regards to the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchy. In view of the powerful nature of the opposition to discrimination against *conversos* in mid-fifteenth-century Castile and, least of all, the strong condemnation expressed by Pope Nicholas V in his bull *Humani Generis Inimicus* in September 1449, it is clear that Alonso de Espina was compelled to tread carefully to avoid the real danger of being accused of heresy by his detractors. In fact although Alonso de Espina does not represent the *conversos* as predetermined to judaize by their biological descent from Jews, he forges an image of generalized *converso* judaizing designed to collectively label all *conversos* and thus persuade his readers of the gravity of the situation facing Castile and the consequent need for draconian countermeasures.

When condemning the rebels of Toledo, Pope Nicholas explicitly referred to the authority of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians in his bull. To circumvent any possible use of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians against him, Alonso de Espina launches his theological attack on judaizing *conversos* in book two of the *Fortalitium Fidei* by focusing on the condemnation of the continued practice of physical circumcision by Christians that Paul makes later in Galatians (4:31-5:6) and, as it has been mentioned above, in Titus (1: 10-14).[[27]](#footnote-27) There is indeed evidence that an unknown but significant number of *conversos* continued to practice physical circumcision in Castile prior to the establishment of the Inquisition but insofar as Alonso de Espina presented the problem: it was the overwhelming majority of them. He was not alone in this belief. When his fellow Franciscan Hernando de la Plaza preached a sermon at the Court, he claimed to have found (and possess) a hundred foreskins belonging to *conversos*. This bizarre claim was swiftly demonstrated to be false and led to a fall in the influence of the Franciscans (Espina included) at the Castilian court. Accusations of circumcision also figure prominently in fifteenth-century poems seeking to defame individuals.[[28]](#footnote-28)

To focus on the issue of *converso* circumcision, however, is to overlook the crux of the battle that opposed Alonso de Espina and the defenders of the *conversos*. *Converso* apologists themselves acknowledged the reality of judaizing and the controversy was over the true extent of the problem in Castile: between the generalization of the ‘*converso* problem’ presented by Espina and its minimization by the likes of Alonso de Cartagena, Juan de Torquemada and (later) Alonso de Oropesa. Early modern Spanish and Portuguese authors pointed to the processions of convicted judaizers at successive inquisitorial *autos-de-fé* as evidence of widespread judaizing but Espina, writing before an Inquisition was established, could only direct his readers to some “investigations” (*pesquisas*) undertaken in Toledo (presumably by the rebels) and in Palencia (conducted by its bishop in 1458) as documentary proof. Since, unsurprisingly in a late medieval context, little documentary data existed to support his claims; it was Alonso de Espina’s task to paint a persuasive yet indiscriminate image of the *converso* population of Castile as inveterate judaizers through the use of exemplary stories and case-studies. This systematic collective labelling of *conversos* as judaizers is part of a conscious propagandistic strategy closely linked both to the readers that Espina was seeking to reach and his stated objective of establishing an Inquisition in Castile.

In his effort to present the conversion of Jews as almost always fraudulent and the sincerity of most *conversos* as correspondingly suspect, Alonso de Espina needed to offer his readers supporting examples and analogous precedents. His references to the punishment of false Jewish converts in the pre-Islamic Visigothic kingdom of Spain (a reference to Proverbs 26:11) who “returned to their vomit” (before CE 711) and to Visigothic laws, promulgated to punish the relapsed converts, doubtless carried considerable weight in a society that systematically looked to the Visigothic period as a source of legitimacy.[[29]](#footnote-29) He was not, however, beyond appealing to legend and presenting it as historical fact. In this respect, his narration of a mythical event supposed to have occurred in England is particularly interesting.

In brief, the story runs as follows: in order to avert the anger of God, who was inflicting wars, plagues and famine upon his kingdom for the crimes and impiety of its inhabitants, a King of England (who is not identified by name) compelled the Jews of England to convert to Christianity. When this forced conversion did not placate divine anger, the King’s advisers warned him that the reason for this was that the converts were not sincere neophytes but secret judaizers who now took advantage of their new position to commit even more heinous crimes against the Christian faith whilst enriching themselves at the expense of the “true Christians” of England and effectively “enslave” them (*ut veri christiani quasi captiui viderentur eorum*). Seeking to put their faith to the test, the King of English ordered that two tents should be raised close to the seashore. In one of these tents the King placed a cross and in the other one a Torah. The King then gave the converts the impression that, reversing the earlier forced conversion, he would allow any judaizing converts to return to Judaism and that they would not face any reprisals for wishing to abandon Christianity. The converts were instructed to choose a tent and, Alonso de Espina claims, they all chose to go to the tent in which the Torah was located. Upon entering it, however, they were killed and their bodies cast into the sea.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The origin of this bizarre and ugly little story is mysterious. It is, of course, entirely legendary as there is no evidence of events even remotely similar taking place in England prior to the expulsion of the Jews by King Edward I in 1290. Espina claims that the story was related in certain unidentified “ancient English chronicles” (*cronicis anglorum antiquis*) but it has not been possible to substantiate this claim. It has hitherto not been possible to find an earlier source for this story other than Alonso de Espina’s *Fortalitium Fidei*. It may well be that Espina did not invent the story but was reporting a legend that was circulating orally in the Iberian Peninsula during the first half of the fifteenth century. Although discussed in the third book of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, which is dedicated to Jews rather than *converso* heretics, and presented as an argument justifying an expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the story has a direct bearing on the polemic surrounding the judaizing of *conversos*. The similarity of the scenario presented by the story – one in which dissembling judaizing converts were undermining a Christian society from within – is so suspiciously similar to the claims put forward by the opponents of the Iberian *conversos* that it is entirely likely that the story was manufactured in fifteenth-century Castile by those seeking to justify anti-*converso* discrimination.

The manner in which Espina relates the story makes it very clear that not only does he consider Jewish converts to constitute a single homogenous group sharing the same desire to judaize but that he wished his readers to share this opinion. His choice of words and attention to detail certainly leaves little room for doubt. According to Espina’s account “all” (*omnes*) of the converts without exception, and including their wives and children, proved their falsity and dissembling nature by immediately “rushing to the Torah” (*Ad Thorah concurrerunt*). Moreover, the fact that Espina concludes the story with a cautionary warning to his Spanish readers – whom he advises to meditate about whether a “similar plagueis alive and growing amongst them” (*similis plaga viget et continuo inter eos crescat*) – makes it very clear that Espina had Castile’s own ‘*converso* problem’ in mind when writing this section of his work.

Even though we have no evidence of the *Fortalitium Fidei*’s impact on the anti-*converso* movement in the fifteenth century, Espina’s success in communicating an anti-*converso* message through the story of the slaughter of the English *conversos* was significant in the long term. Although hidden away in book three, this anti-*converso* case-study became an infamous *cause célèbre* repeatedly cited (with very little alteration) by the authors of various later Spanish and Portuguese anti-Semitic treatises written in the following centuries, long after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and whose targets were the *conversos*. The most notable are Vicente da Costa Mattos in his *Breve Discurso* (where Espina is explicitly cited in the margin); Francisco de Torrejoncillo in his *Centinela contra Judíos* (chapter two, although it appears that Torrejoncillo plagiarised the aforementioned Portuguese author) and Benito Remigio Noydens (1630–1685) in his 1662 *Visita general y espiritual* ***colirio*** *de los iudios*.[[31]](#footnote-31) Vicente da Costa Mattos and Francisco de Torrejoncillo relate the same story although they substitute a copy of the “Bible” for the Torah mentioned by Espina and alter the ending, probably to lend it greater credibility. In their version, the King has the judaizing *conversos* brought to his own tent one by one under the pretext that he wishes to grant them passports and safe-conducts permitting them to return to the regions and towns from which they had come and then has every one of them slaughtered inside. The two authors also comment on the similarity of the English scenario with the ‘problem’ faced by their own society. For both Vicente da Costa Mattos and Torrejoncillo, the story was presented as a justifying argument in their appeals to the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns for a wholesale expulsion not of Jews but of the *conversos*.

In order to fully understand why Espina focuses on representing the judaizing of *conversos* as generalized, it is crucial to consider what readership he had in mind when writing the *Fortalitium Fidei*. Even though it is clearly crucial to analyse Alonso de Espina’s work alongside those of opponents like Alonso de Cartagena or Juan de Torquemada, Alonso de Espina did not write for the benefit of these critics. Espina himself is quite clear that the intended readership of the *Fortalitium Fidei* was not high-ranking Churchmen or theologians but the complete opposite: “I have written this book for the ignorant, so that they may find in a brief tome the weapons necessary to face the enemies of Christ”.[[32]](#footnote-32) As an experienced mendicant preacher, Espina was used to preaching to simple lay folk but it appears highly improbable that they were his intended “ignorant” readers (*ignorantibus*). The extent of lay literacy in fifteenth-century Castile was limited and, though gradually expanding, especially in the aristocracy, it is probable that less than ten percent of the lay male population possessed a degree of literacy sufficient to read books.[[33]](#footnote-33) Moreover, although some secular readers did read Latin, the reading skills of most of them, one may hypothesize, were confined to vernacular Castilian and did not extend to a reading knowledge of Latin. Espina’s deliberate choice of Latin was certainly a crucial factor in the success of his work outside of the Iberian Peninsula but the uncomplicated Latin prose of Espina’s text, and its lack of rhetorical sophistication, seems to point to a desire to effectively communicate information to members of the lower clergy possessing a limited theological education (including some of his fellow mendicants). These were the men who could then be trusted to pass on his anti-*converso* and anti-Jewish message to the popular masses in their own sermons. Whilst his opponents enjoyed privileged access to the King and court circles, it seems plausible to argue that Espina realised that only social pressure from amongst the lower orders of the Church and amongst the wider mass of the Old Christian population, for instance when their representatives were summoned by the Crown to parliament (*cortes*), would influence the Crown to decisively alter its stance towards the *conversos* and support the establishment of a “real” Inquisition into Castile. This was, after all, the explicitly stated ambition of Alonso de Espina who argues that “if a real Inquisition was conducted in our times, an innumerable number of [execution pyres] would burn those revealed to be judaizers and if they are not [punished], even more harshly than public Jews, then they will be burnt in the eternal fire [of hellish damnation].[[34]](#footnote-34) Even in this short passage, Espina expresses his firm conviction that the near totality of the *converso* population is judaizing since practically all of them will ultimately be burnt as a punishment for their heresy, either in this world at the hands of the inquisitors or in the infernal fires of hellish damnation.

**Alonso de Espina, Genealogical Determinism and Judaizing of *Conversos***

Whilst the belief that Judaism was a hereditary trait passed on from parent to child and from generation to generation through bloodlines became a widely accepted claim in early modern Spain and Portugal, Alonso de Espina’s approach to this subject does not conform to such a belief. In the *Fortalitium Fidei*, Espina characterises both the Jews and *conversos* collectively, insisting that their violent attacks upon Christianity and Christians (in the case of the Jews) and judaizing (in the case of the *conversos*) are prevalent in both groups. Yet one major difference that sets Espina apart in his treatment of *conversos* from later anti-Semitic writers like Vicente da Costa Mattos or Francisco de Torrejoncillo is an unwillingness to proceed from a collective generalization (all *conversos* are judaizers) to ascribing the judaizing of *conversos* to their genealogical descent (all *conversos* are judaizers because they are of Jewish descent).

Espina’s attitude toward the unconverted Jews of Castile demonstrates that he certainly appears to have considered the ‘wickedness’ of the Jews towards Christians, their hatred of the Christian faith and refusal to acknowledge the truth of Christ’s claim to be the Messiah as inherent traits of unconverted Jews. This inheritance, however, is not a biological one but rather one that can be described as a ‘moral’ insofar as one generation of Jews consciously teaches and passes on a framework of anti-Christian values to the next generation through the transmission of its traditions, beliefs and Talmudic teachings. This, then, is the inherited culpability of the Jews and it is clearly an inheritance that is not transmitted through the blood but rather through knowledge, ink and parchment. It is conveyed by means of an obdurate devotion to the “Talmudic doctrine” (*talmuth doctrina*) and the “stupidities of the Jews” (*iudaeorum fatuitatibus*) that it contained.[[35]](#footnote-35) For Espina, this is also the cause of physical attacks perpetrated by Jews against both Christians and symbols of Christianity, which he describes in book three as part of the wider “Jewish war” (*bello iudaeorum*) waged against Christendom, and which he seeks to substantiate by means of listing various “cruelties of the Jews” (*iudaeorum crudelitatibus*, namely various betrayals, poisonings, host desecrations and ritual murders) spanning centuries and occurring in different regions. [[36]](#footnote-36) Jews are not born to hate and kill Christians but are taught that this is what they must do.

In book three of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, Espina demonstrates that he favours the fourteenth-century Franciscan theologian Nicholas of Lyra’s rationalization of Jewish obduracy and spiritual ‘blindness’ in his *Postilla Litteralis super totam Bbliam*. Lyra presents this not as the result of a divine curse but rather as caused by the Jews own free will.[[37]](#footnote-37) This stance was not designed to free the Jews of any inherited culpability but rather to accentuate it. Jewish culpability does not remain fixed as one generation passes on its infidelity and hatred of Christianity to another generation but actually increases since, in Espina’s eyes, the proof of Jesus Christ’s claim to be the Messiah had only become clearer with each passing year of the millennia and a half that separated the fifteenth century from the crucifixion of Christ. [[38]](#footnote-38)

Almost immediately after discussing the responsibility of free will in the obduracy of the Jews, Espina nevertheless proceeds to examine the ‘ancestry’ (*parentela*) of the Jews. To do this, he cites passages relating to the Book of Genesis that are extracted from the work of the Talmudic Scholar Rabbi Eliezer and which he sourced from the treatise *De iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut* of the fifteenth-century Iberian Jewish convert to Christianity Jerónimo de Santa Fe. Without providing any context, Espina interprets the passages literally a proof of the lack of Jewish understanding and as “vile and sacrilegious, in addition to falsely duplicitous in its reasoning (*videte quomodo hoc est abominabile et immundum preter eo quod est falsum duplici ratione*)”. These extracts, from Rabbi Eliezer’s commentary on Genesis 2, ascribe not only an illustrious ancestry to the Jews in the form of Isaac or Abraham but also grotesque and monstrous forbearers, the fruit of bestial intercourse committed by Adam before the creation of Eve). Whilst an author keen to account for Jewish perfidy through genealogical determinism would doubtless have seized upon such claims as proof of a genealogical connection between Jews and demons, Espina instead rejects the stories as “all false and deceitful” (*omnia sunt falsa et mendacia*). The “falseness of their [Jewish] doctrines”, Espina states, is patent for all to see since the Jews would thereby be ascribing to themselves kinship ties with monsters and vile animals such as pigs and mules:

Quicquid sit de falsitate huius doctrina patet quod ibidem dicit rabi eliezer. Quod adam coivit cum omnibus brutis et iumentis et inde geniti sint homines montruosi si ex quo concluduntur duo. Primo quod iudei sunt frates hominum monstruosorum. Secundo quod azina et porca sunt noverce eorum.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Espina certainly does go on to cite other Jewish legends found in the Talmud of demon conceptions by Adam and the she-demon Lilith, his first wife before the creation of Eve, as well as well as a story of intercourse between Eve and a the snake/Devil. His intentions, however, is not to endorse any genealogical determinism but rather it is in accordance with an established polemical trend in western Christendom that built on the words of Christ related by John 8:44 (vos ex patre diabolo estis) by ‘demonizing’ Jews who did not accept baptism, representing them as tools of the Devil, who could manipulate their free will.[[40]](#footnote-40) Even when he is at his most injurious against the Jews “who imitate the serpent” (i.e. the Devil), Espina points out that such claims come “from the Talmud and their learned [rabbis]’s doctrine”, which he has earlier criticised as false:

Patet ergo iudeorum parentela ex talmuth et doctorum suorum doctrina. Quia sunt fratres hominum monstruorum ex bestis natorum. Sunt etiam eorum nouerce asina et porca et omnes alie femelle bestiales. Sunt fratres non minus demonum et filii dyaboli necnon. Habentes pro vitrico serpentem eiusdem mores imitantes.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Netanyahu interprets this part of the *Fortalitium Fidei* as evidence that Espina “was full of race hatred and race bias” but a far more nuanced interpretation is necessary as Netanyahu overlooks the fact that Espina explicitly states his disbelief the legends of the Talmud. [[42]](#footnote-42) Espina’s examination of the ancestry of the Jews must not be straightforwardly understood as implying an acceptance genealogical determinism affecting even those Jews who had converted and their descendants that contradicts his earlier acceptance of free will. Instead, Espina’s main point is to use such extracts from Rabbinic writings as evidence of the collective foolishness of the unconverted Jews in general and of Jewish Rabbis, whose Rabbinic scholarship was playing a key role in preventing Jews from recognising the truth of Christ’s claim to be the Messiah, in particular.

With respect to the *conversos*, Espina appears to follow a very similar approach. Early in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, when seeking to define heresy, Espina follows and references the concept put forward by the seventh-century Saint Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* (book eight, chapter III, 1-3), quoting Isidore’s text verbatim. Saint Isidore explicitly presented heretical belief as the result of a free personal choice made by an individual to follow his or her own will:

*Haeresis Graece ab electione vocatur, quod scilicet unusquisque id sibi eligat quod melius illi esse videtur, ut philosophi Peripatetici, Academici, et Epicurei et Stoici, vel sicut alii qui perversum dogma cogitantes arbitrio suo de Ecclesia recesserunt. Inde ergo haeresis, dicta Graeca voce, ex interpretatione electionis, qua quisque arbitrio suo ad instituenda, sive ad suscipienda quaelibet ipse sibi elegit. Nobis vero nihil ex nostro arbitrio inducere licet, sed nec eligere quod aliqui de arbitrio suo induxerit. Apostolos Dei habemus auctores, qui nec ipsi quicquam ex suo arbitrio, quod inducerent, elegerunt, sed acceptam a Christo disciplinam fideliter nationibus adsignaverunt. Itaque etiamsi angelus de caelis aliter evangelizaverit, anathema vocabitur*.[[43]](#footnote-44)

Although individuals chose to become heretics this does not mean that heresy, such as judaizing, was an individual phenomenon since, as Saint Isidore explained, a heretical movement was composed of individuals who had each chosen to espouse the heretical beliefs of that movement. In this regard, Espina’s understanding about the origins of the judaizing of *conversos* is not so different from that relating to the obduracy of the Jews when, as we have seen further above, Espina follows the teachings of Nicholas of Lyra. *Conversos* judaizebecause they choose to continue believing in Mosaic Law and the Talmud and raise their children accordingly but not in response to some biological imperative. Consequently, Espina’s approach must be distinguished from the clear genealogical determinism embraced both in his own epoch by the rebels of Toledo in the 1449 statutes and the Bachiller Marcos García de Mora in his *memorial* as well as by later early modern Spanish and Portuguese authors like Vicente da Costa Mattos or Francisco de Torrejoncillo.

Whilst Alonso de Espina does not represent the errors of the Jews and *conversos* as the result of genealogical determinism, Rosa Vidal Doval has nonetheless argued that, one of the ideas that Espina establishes in the second book of the *Fortalitium Fidei* is that the “crimes and heresies” of the *conversos* are in essence “fundamental character flaws amongst *conversos*”. To support this claim, she rightly asserts that Espina links Judaism with other beliefs and practices that are not directly related to it (such as astrology) and posits that “by expanding the range of behaviours and beliefs that could be associated with Judaism, Espina sought to demonstrate that many errors were not simply errors but judaizing heresy”.[[44]](#footnote-45) It is difficult to perceive, however, the extent to which this generalization of judaizing is a exaggeration by Espina, motivated by sinister intentions, or merely a reflection of the socio-religious realities of mid-fifteenth-century Castile and the complexities of *converso* religiosity. The humanist bishop of Burgos, Alonso de Palencia, noted the great knowledge of astrology and astronomy possessed by one of the *conversos* forced to flee Toledo in 1449.[[45]](#footnote-46)

Once more, it is important to note that, as we shall see below, Espina does not limit character flaws to Jews alone but to all humans and that his generalized labelling of *conversos* judaizers does not lead him to endorse genealogical determinism in respect to them. When it comes to Jewish converts to Christianity in general, Espina’s attitude is one of suspicion regarding their motives. He accepts that genuine conversions are entirely possible but clearly believes that most are likely to be spurred by insincere motives, notably the lust for “earthly wealth” (sed propter *lucrum temporale tales baptizati sunt*). For Espina the crucial period for the successful indoctrination of converts from Judaism is, unsurprisingly, that which extends between the moment when a catechumen declares his or her intention of converting and the actual ceremony of baptism. To ensure the highest chances of a proper indoctrination and avoid the threat of converts relapsing and “returning to their vomit”, this period of catechization must not be rushed. Espina states his opinion that this period should last no less than eight months (a time period originally set at the Council of Agde in CE 506), ignoring the fact that, a century later, Saint Gregory I reduced the minimum time period to forty days. Before the eight months have elapsed, baptism should only be granted to catechumens suffering from cases of severe illness, when their lives (and consequently their unconverted souls as well) are in dire peril.[[46]](#footnote-47)

How easily could a convert be purged of generations of Jewish teachings and belief? Citing Galatians (chapter 6, verse 15), Espina certainly never casts doubts upon the efficacy of the saving grace that baptism conferred upon genuine converts.[[47]](#footnote-48) To do so would have placed Espina in a very difficult and potentially dangerous position. He argues instead that the efficacy of baptism depends on the free will and genuine sentiments of the convert. It is striking that Espina obviously does not think that sincere conversions were common and or that mass conversions were really possible. The examples of genuine conversions which he highlights involve miracles in which the conversion of a Jew or Jewess is not the result of their spontaneous decision to recognise the truth of Christianity. Rather it is a response to miraculous circumstances over which the se individuals have little or no control, such as after unsuccessful attempts to profane Christian sacred objects, after observing miraculous symbols of the cross appear on their clothing or, in the case of a Jewess accused of adultery, after being saved by the Virgin Mary from the fury of her coreligionaries.[[48]](#footnote-49)

When talking about more recent Jewish converts to Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula, Espina clearly prefers to select the stories of individual converts who actively denounced Judaism and the perfidy of Jews in works that they had written, something that would itself support Espina’s own claims about converts and which clearly sets out these few individuals apart from the remainder of *conversos*. These exemplary converts include, of course, some of his main sources of information (Alfonso *converso*, also known as Alfonso of Valladolid/Abner of Burgos and Juan *converso*, also known as Juan of Valladolid). Moreover, relating a first-hand experience, Espina recalls that whilst he was in the Franciscan convent in Valladolid in 1456 he met a Jew from the Italian city of Genoa named Emmanuel. The Jew claimed that he wished to convert and, when questioned by Espina about his motives for wishing to embrace the Christian faith, highlighted stories of Jewish ritual murder in various parts of Italy. Once again, it is the willingness of this specific convert to denounce the ‘crimes’ of Judaism that marks him out as exceptional and renders the sincerity of his conversion credible.[[49]](#footnote-50) Highlighting the exceptional nature of these conversions and how the attachment of Jews to Judaism was spurred by non-spiritual considerations such as their “inordinate love” (*inordinatibus amor*) of their family members, Espina relates another personal experience that resulted from his relationship with “one of the most intelligent Jews in this kingdom” (*quidam de sapientoribus iudeis istius regni*). Espina claims that he met the unnamed Jew to discuss the Pentateuch over the space of four years and that the latter secretly confessed to him that he believed that Christianity was the true faith but could not bring himself to convert out of fear that his father, whom he “loved inordinately” (*amoris paternis inordinati*), would die of grief if his son converted.[[50]](#footnote-51)

By emphasizing the exceptional nature of sincere Jewish conversions to Christianity Espina never intends to suggest that they were impossible. Immediately after relating his dialogue with the unnamed Jew who secretly acknowledged the falsity of Judaism, Espina tackles a passage from the Old Testament that is particularly relevant to the problem at hand, Jeremiah 13:23:

*si mutare potest Aethiops pellem suam aut pardus varietates suas et vos poteritis bene facere cum didiceritis malum*

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil?

A literal reading of this biblical passage appears to support the argument that all evildoers are naturally predisposed to commit evil deeds and that it is pointless to seek to change them. Yet Espina does not espouse this position in regards to Jews and *conversos* but follows, once more, Nicholas of Lyra’s interpretation of the passage that it cannot be applied to discount the possibility of genuine conversions. Lyra and Espina accept that, like all human beings in the wake of the biblical fall of Adam and Eve, the Jews have a natural inclination to succumb to temptation and commit evil rather than good. Yet they both unambiguously agree that any comparison of the Jews to either an Ethiopian or a leopard must not be understood to rule out genuine conversions since free will can always overcome evil, albeit “with difficulty” (*et ideo per conatum liberi arbitrii ad oppositum potest reuerti ad bonum tamen cum difficultate propter habitum inclinamtem ad oppositium*). Lyra adds, for good measure, that changes which seem impossible through nature are not impossible for God and Espina heartily concurs with this assessment although he emphasises that “great virtue in the heart is necessary” (*magna virtus cordis est necessaria*) for Jews “who have been fed that [Jewish/Talmudic] doctrine since childhood” to become sincere Christians.[[51]](#footnote-52)

Even insincere converts are not entirely beyond hope. Espina is clear that judaizing *conversos* may well come to perceive the error of their beliefs and become genuine Christians. Once more, however, such post-baptism conversions were likely to be few in number and miraculous in nature. Espina thinks that such instances of judaizing *conversos* genuinely recanting will be the result of God’s doing: either by means of a “sign” (*signa*) or some divine “tribulations” (*tribulationes*) inflicted upon the *conversos*. Such repentant heretics could, when properly catechized under the close spiritual supervision of the friars, become heartfelt Christians. Far from resigning himself to a form of spiritual fatalism or pessimism, Espina states that it is even possible for the children and descendants of hardened judaizing *conversos* to come to acknowledge the “catholic truth and salvation” (*catholice veritatis e saluabuntur*) and abjure the “*iudayca perfidia*” through their everyday exposure to Catholicism .[[52]](#footnote-53)

In the case of child converts, Espina subscribes wholeheartedly to the views of the Franciscan theologian and philosopher Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308), for whom the children of Jews must be completely isolated from any Jews, and especially their parents, and raised by Old Christians (preferably in monasteries) in order to ensure that they do not grow up to become judaizers. Once more, however, it is worth noting that the legitimacy of the forced conversion of Jews, whether adults or children, was far from a mainstream doctrine in the fifteenth-century Iberian Church. The later seizure of Jewish children from their parents and their forcible baptism in Portugal under King João II in 1492 and King Manuel I in 1497, caused considerable controversy both in theological circles and even, according to a Portuguese chronicler, amongst some ordinary Old Christians who were sufficiently moved to hide Jewish children.[[53]](#footnote-54) Espina’s reference to Duns Scotus’s view on the conversion of children is significant because it demonstrates once more that he does not subscribe to proto-racialist ideas. Jewish children became Jews through their exposure to Jewish teachings and Judaism was not transmitted to them through the bloodline.[[54]](#footnote-55) Given Espina’s position, he would certainly not have endorsed folk tales circulating in the early modern Iberian Peninsula in which it was claimed that *converso* children abandoned at birth and raised by Old Christians as foundlings, without any contact with *conversos*, had spontaneously turned into judaizers.[[55]](#footnote-56)

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion of her own study of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, Rosa Vidal Doval has argued that we must be cautious not to conflate Espina’s perception of Castile’s religious problems in the 1450 with the measures taken against Jews and *conversos* many decades later by the Catholic Monarchs Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragón:

That Espina’s intervention in the *converso* debate moved things closer to [the establishment of the Inquisition in] 1480 and [the expulsion of the Jews in 1492] is true only in retrospect. This, in the end, may be the real significance of the *Fortalitium Fidei*. Its importance lies less in what Espina actually proposed and more in the subsequent fortunes of his text.[[56]](#footnote-57)

Whilst one cannot disagree with Rosa Vidal Doval’s assessment, it is nonetheless possible to go further when examining the originality and influence of the *Fortalitium Fidei*. In an Iberian context, the influence of Alonso de Espina’s work on later anti-Semitic diatribes printed in early modern Spain and Portugal and the formation of a collective image of the *conversos* as incorrigible judaizers is not an accident. Espina’s lurid rhetoric condemning the “Jewish perfidy” and calling for the expulsion of all Jews from Castile and his generalizing denunciation of *converso* judaizing as a “raging plague” that only a “true Inquisition” can purge made the *Fortalitium Fidei* an obvious source of inspiration for later Iberian authors.

There is one respect, however, in which it is difficult to see Espina’s work as foreshadowing later developments. When compared with the claims made in the 1449 statute of the Toledan rebels and the *memorial* of the *Bachiller* Marcos García de Mora, the *Fortalitium Fidei* is striking because it does not follow such an explicit racialist path. Far from endorsing genealogical or biological determinism, Espina prefers instead to insist on the exceptionality of genuine Jewish conversions to Christianity and to blame the judaizing of *conversos* upon factors other than bloodlines. For Espina, the prospect of a successful religious assimilation of the *conversos* remains a possibility but it is one remote one and one that is contingent upon the implementation of three measures: the establishment of an effective Inquisition to stamp out judaizing, a ruthless campaign of removal of *converso* children from their parents and the expulsion of all unconverted Jews from Castile. In this respect, Espina cannot be compared to later anti-Semitic polemicists like Vicente da Costa Mattos and Francisco de Torrejoncillo. Such authors, writing after the establishment of the Inquisition in 1480 and the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, had abandoned any hope of ever resolving the ‘*converso* problem’ and consequently advocated nothing less than the wholesale expulsion of all *conversos* from Portugal or Spain.

In spite of its influence on later, openly racialist, anti-Semitic polemics and works supporting the statutes of *limpieza de sangre*, Espina’s work cannot be presented as the inspiration for the biological racialism that later came to define anti-*converso* sentiment in Spain from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Indeed, in light of the his own statements in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, it appears dubious that Alonso de Espina would have subscribed or even understood the claims made by the author(s) of the 1494 *Repertorium Inquisitorium* – a manual for inquisitors printed in Valencia – that “the Jews transmit the perfidy of the Old Law [of Moses] to each other from father to son, through the blood”[[57]](#footnote-58) or even the seventeenth-century Portuguese preacher João de Ceita’s thunderous assertion that the *conversos* were the “born enemies of Christ [and Christians], by ancestry and blood”.[[58]](#footnote-59) Despite calling for the expulsion of the Jews from Castile, Espina is not an advocate of indiscriminate ethnic-cleansing within the Christian population.

Finally, it is worth noting the crucial historical significance of the *Fortalitium Fidei* in another respect, one that has been overlooked by modern historians. The *Fortalitum Fidei* was not a religious polemic seeking to make a contribution to a debate but a work of pure propaganda calling for an Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews and designed to whip up sentiment against non-Catholics and thereby shape royal policy. It has become commonplace amongst historians to consider the sixteenth-century Reformation in northern Europe as marking the birth of ‘mass propaganda’ through the prolific use that the reformers (and their Catholic opponents) made of printed pamphlets and images to win over the hearts and minds of Europeans to their cause.[[59]](#footnote-60) Although it was written in Latin and (with the exception of beautiful illuminations in a few of the manuscript copies[[60]](#footnote-61)) is not illustrated, I would strongly argue that Alonso de Espina’s *Fortalitium Fidei* is a work of mass propaganda foreshadowing the important transformation that the polemical genre of ‘*adversus judaeos’* works underwent in the Hispanic and Portuguese worlds during the early modern period. This transformation witnessed the emergence of two parallel types of anti-Jewish works. One of these strands is the ‘traditional’ polemical work in which a Christian author seek to present theological and exegetical arguments proving the validity of the Christian faith and Christ’s Messiahship whilst simultaneously exposing the ‘blindness’ of the Jews. The other strand, however, is not so much focused on theological polemic but instead is more concerned with representing the Jews/judaizing *conversos* as a direct and grave existential threat to all Christians, whatever their status. The *Fortalitium Fidei* clearly straddles both of these strands. Although it contains a violent theological attack on Judaism and judaizing heretics, its purpose of promoting an ‘exclusionist’ programme of religious reform could not have been fulfilled without seeking to cultivate the fears of its readers about the hostility of Jews towards Christians and dashing any hopes they may have entertained about the genuine conversion of *conversos*.

1. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Rosa Vidal Doval (Queen Mary, University of London), who generously read an early version of this article and provided extremely valuable feedback. Any errors are, of course, entirely my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 79; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for instance, Maurice Pinay, *The Plot against the Church* (Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 496-8. Originally published in 1962, its real author or authors is/are assumed to have been a group of ultra-conservative members of the Church hierarchy in Spain or Latin America opposed to the reforms introduced as a result of the Second Vatican Council. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Francisco Bethencourt, Racisms*: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2014); Max S. Hering Torres, “Purity of Blood. Problems of Interpretation”, *Race and Blood in the Iberian World* (Münster, 2012), edited by Max S. Hering Torres, María Elena Martínez and David Nirenberg, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Nirenberg, “Mass conversion and genealogical mentalities: Jews and Christians in fifteenth-century Spain”, *Past and Present*, 174 (2002), p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Max S. Hering Torres, “‘Raza’: variables históricas”, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 26 (2007), pp. 16-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo (the Archpriest of Talavera), *El Corbacho* (Madrid, 2011), pp. 42-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “…*qui vol haver bona raça o casta de cavalls*…”; David Nirenberg, “Was there race before modernity?”, *The Origins of Racism in the West*, edited by Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge, 2009), p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See my discussion on racial terminology in F. Soyer, *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and its Empire. Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela contra Judíos* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 24-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Henri Méchoulan, “Du racisme religieux de Torrejoncillo à l’antijudaisme «éclairé» de Feijoo”, *Revue des Études Juives*, 154 (1995), pp. 363-385 and Albert Sicroff,  “Spanish anti-Judaism : a case of religious racism”, *Encuentros y Desencuentros*, edited by Carlos Carrete Parrondo, Marcelo Dascal, Francisco Márquez Villanueva, Ángel Sáenz Badillos (Tel Aviv, 2000), pp. 589-662. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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12. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13960-spina-espina-alfonso-de> [accessed on 5 December 2014]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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14. Francisco Cantera, “Fernando de Pulgar y los Conversos”, *Sefarad*, 4 (1944), pp. 295-348 (see page 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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17. Hans Karl Briegleb, *Die Ausweisung der Juden von Nürnberg im Jahre 1499: Geschichtlicher Rückblick* (Leipzig, 1868). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Pedro Aznar Cardona,*Expulsión justificada de los* moriscos *españoles* *y suma de las excellencias de nuestro Rey Don Felipe el Catholico Tercero deste nombre* (Huesca, 1612), fols. 184r-184v. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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20. John Edwards, *The Jews in Western Europe 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 100-1; Eloy Benito Ruano, “El memorial contra los conversos del Bachiller Marcos García de Mora («Marquillos de Mazarambroz»)”, *Sefarad*, 17 (1957), pp. 314-351. There is now a considerable secondary literature on the 1449 revolt and the infamous *sentencia-estatuto*. See especially Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York, 1995), pp. 814-896. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
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60. See, for instance, the handful of elaborate fifteenth-century illuminations of the two-volume French translation preserved in the British Library, Royal 17 F VI and Royal 17 F VII. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)