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# The political difference of the ideological Conversos from Judaism

By *Shalom Sadik\**

## *Abstract*

*One of the major difference between the mass conversion of Jews to Christianity in Spain (Castile and Aragon) and Portugal was the existence in Spain of a massive trend of Jewish Rabbi that convert to Christianity and try to convince there former fellows Jews to do the same. These Rabbis like Petrus Alfonsi; Abner of Burgos; Pablo de Santa Maria or Jerónimo de Santa Fé build an ideological justification and motivation for the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. This ideology have a very important influence because it allow the creation of a mass of truly Christian Conversos and also give to the less ideological convert an easy way to explain their decision to apostate there ancient religion. All these convers have a different view of Christianity and Judaism. For example, their view on Trinity and Incarnation are very different (like the view of the different Christians thinkers themselves). In spite of this diversity in their definition of Christianity, there are some very important point in common in their definition of Judaism.*

*The principal view that they share in there definition of Judaism is the political aspect of Judaism as a religion of mitzwot (religious obligation) dominate by the rabbi that hold their power on the base of a tradition that come back to the origin of the Talmud. Theses apostate build their breakdown of Judaism on basis of the critic of these hearth of the rabbinic Judaism. These specific critics try to convince other Jews that the politic foundation of Judaism is spoiled and inferior to the Christian ideal. The conclusion of this argument will be to leave the Jewish (or pharisaic) society and to join the Christian people.*

*In this article, we will see briefly the critics of Petrus Alfonsi; Abner of Burgos; Pablo de Santa María; Jerónimo de Santa Fé. We will see that despite the divergence of opinion between the diver's apostate and their different critics of Judaism there are some common definition of Judaism beyond their critic.*

Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a substantial number of Spanish rabbis and other prestigious members of the intellectual elite of the Jewish community rejected their faith in favour of Christianity. These apostates left their former faith and faith community for different ideological reasons<sup>1</sup> (mainly philosophical, theological, and political) that convinced

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1 In contrast, to other types of apostates that left their former faith due to social and economic reasons or because of physical violence against them.

them that Christianity is the true religion (in the following article, I call these *conversos* “ideological *conversos*”). These *conversos* built an ideology of apostasy that helped to make conversion to Christianity easier for the other parts of the Spanish Jewish community. Following their conversion, they tried to propagate their new faith amongst their former co-religionists. Such proselytizing was implemented in a number of ways, including public debates and writings in Hebrew, Latin and (old) Spanish. This phenomenon of intellectual apostates played an important role in the mass conversion to Christianity that occurred at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and continued throughout the entire 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon was so widespread that at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the Spanish-Jewish community – heretofore the most important Jewish community of Europe – had converted to Christianity. The primary tool used by the ideological and intellectual conversos<sup>3</sup> to influence the Jewish community was their writings, which sought to convince Jewish readers to adopt a similarly ideological Christian theology. These evangelising writings also provided an ideological fig leaf for less intellectual Jews who were seeking justification for their conversions. Moreover, the very awareness of the unforced nature of the conversions of so many respected rabbis and well-versed communal leaders itself almost certainly had a major impact on the Jewish community. While other Jewish communities felt an intense dislike of Trinitarian Christianity, seeing it as a form of paganism, the conversion of Spanish Jewish scholars to Christianity for intellectual reasons, and not just because of economic temptation or physical violence against them, remained an on-going public phenomenon, because they perceived Christianity as the true religion, and this perception largely contributed to the suppression of feelings of intense aversion of Christianity

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2 On the mass conversion, see BENZION NETANYAHU, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain*, New York 1995, pp. 129-210; BENZION NETANYAHU, *The Marranos of Spain from the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century according to Contemporary Hebrew Sources*, Ithaca 1998; YITZHAK BAER, תולדות היהודים בספרד הנוצרית, Tel Aviv 1959, pp. 285-363; English: *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. Philadelphia 1961 (1983), vol. II, pp. 244-299; NORMAN ROTH, *Conversos, Inquisition and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, Madison 2002, pp. 15-47.

3 On the influence of the conversion of the elite on the masses of Spanish Jews, see SHALOM SADIK, “בין אשכנז לספרד: המרות הדת האידיאולוגיות של תלמידי חכמים” / Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad: The Ideological Apostate,” in: *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82-83 (2011-2012), pp. סא-עח. It is important to note that the conversion of the elite began before the conversion of the masses.

among Spanish Jews, making them at the same time – in addition to the already existing external pressures, both physical and economic – all the more vulnerable and susceptible to conversion. No such ideologically motivated apostasy existed in Ashkenaz, and this is one of the reasons for the difference in rates of conversion between the Sefardi and Ashkenazi communities.

When examining the phenomenon of ideological apostasy in Spain, two very interesting questions arise: (1) why were Spanish rabbis so much more predisposed to conversion than their Ashkenazi colleagues do. And (2) what was the nature, the essence of their ideology? My focus is on the latter question<sup>4</sup> – the answer to which turns out to be far more intriguing than the deceptive simplicity of the question suggests. For otherwise than one might assume, the ideology of the apostates was by no means monolithic. To the contrary, there were very important differences between the apostates regarding to both, the reasons for their conversion as well as their criticism of the Jewish religion and community.

The intention of this article is to describe and explain the two major areas of their criticism of Judaism, i.e. the theological as well as the political. My main argument will be that, on the theological level, their criticism of Judaism and their definition of Christianity are completely different and even contradictory. By contrast, their criticisms of Judaism on the political issues (broadly defined, that includes all practical arguments comprised moral and social) underlying the keeping of the Jewish religious obligations and rituals are almost identical.

The main topics of the Judeo-Christian debate are the same in the vast majority of these disputes, regardless of whether or not the Christian disputant hailed from a Jewish background. By far and away, the most important theological subjects of these debates are the questions of the Trinity and Incarnation, and so for this reason I focus my analyses of the theological opinions of the apostates on these two subjects, especially the question of the Trinity. As for the purely political issues, the major subject that appears in all these debates is the question of the need to continue to practice the practical part of the Jewish law.

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4 In future studies, I will argue that the pluralistic religious education of the Spanish Jews (not only Jewish Law, but also philosophy, kabbalah and more textual interpretation of the bible than in Ashkenaz) made the ideological conversion easier. Sefardi Jews could criticize the oral Law and the practical practice of the Law on the bases of other parts of religious education. For example, they could think that kabbalah or philosophy leads to Christianity.

In this article, my focus is on five important ideological conversos: Petrus Alfonsi (12<sup>th</sup> c.), Abner of Burgos and Pablo de Santa María (14<sup>th</sup> c.), Jerónimo de Santa Fé and Pedro de la Caballería (15<sup>th</sup> c.).

### 1. *Petrus Alfonsi*

Petrus Alfonsi<sup>5</sup> converted in Huesca, Aragon, at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, probably around 1106. We do not know exactly his age at the time of his conversion, but he probably was in his early thirties or forties. Prior to his conversion, he was physician to the king of Aragon, though after his conversion he immigrated, first to France and then to England, where he became the physician of the King of England, Henry the First.

His major polemical work is *Dialogus contra judaeos*, a dialogue between a certain Moses (not coincidentally Petrus's Hebrew name before his conversion) and Petrus himself. Petrus dedicated the first four chapters of his dialogue to a sharp criticism of Judaism, and the last seven chapters to proving the veracity of Christianity. As an aside, the intervening fifth chapter is a polemic against Islam.

Petrus devoted the sixth chapter of his book to the confirmation of the Trinity. In the beginning of the chapter, he offers his definition of the Trinity before trying to prove the truth of the concept. Petrus states:

I want to call the three persons "Substance", "Wisdom", and "Will". Moreover, I name the first person "substance" for the following reason: because wisdom and will are in it and come from it, while "substance" itself comes from nothing else. Although there are three persons, all are one substance.<sup>6</sup>

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5 On Petrus Alfonsi, see: JOHN VICTOR TOLAN, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers*, Gainesville, FL 1993, pp. 9-11; JOHN VICTOR TOLAN, "Pedro Alfonso, precursor de la literatura apologética," in: MARÍA JESUS LACARRA (ed.), *Pedro Alfonso de Huesca, Diálogo contra los Judíos*, Huesca 1996, pp. XI-XX; LOURDES MARIA ALVÁREZ, "Petrus Alfonsi," in: MARIA ROSA MENOCA, RAYMOND P. SCHEINDLIN, and MICHAEL SELLS (eds.), *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, Cambridge, Mass. 2000, pp. 282-291; MARÍA JESÚS LACARRA, *Pedro Alfonso* (Los Aragoneses, vol. 3), Zaragoza 1991, pp. 9-11; MARIA L. ARDUINI, "'Potere' e 'ragione' nel *Dialogus* di Pietro Alfonsi (Mosè Sefaradi): Linee preliminari per una ipotesi interpretativa," in: *Revista di Filosofia neo-Scholastica* 86 (1994) pp. 219-271.

6 PETRUS ALFONSI, *Dialogue against the Jews*, transl. by Irving M. Resnick (Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation), Washington 2006 (2011), p. 164. Original Latin: *Volo tres personas substantiam, sapientiam et voluntatem dicere. Ideo autem personam primam substantiam appello, quia in ipsa et de ipsa sunt sapientia et voluntas et ipsa de nullo, quamvis tres personae, omnes sint una substantia*. For the edition of the Latin original of the *Dialogus contra Judaeos*, see: MARÍA JESÚS

In this text, we clearly see Petrus's definition of the Trinity: the Father is identified as God's Substance; the Son as God's Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit as God's Will. This definition is, to say the least, *very* un-orthodox from a Catholic point of view for two reasons. First, while Petrus identifies the Trinity with God's attributes, some of the most important post-Nicene fathers of the Church as well as the scholastics of the Middle Ages tried to do precisely the opposite by distinguishing between the Trinity and God's attributes, which they held are the attributes of the entire Godhead, and which can thus be attributed to each one of the different persons of the Trinity. Indeed, during the very same decades that Petrus wrote his *Dialogue*, Peter Abelard got into all kinds of trouble after constructing a very similar theory, which identified the persons of the Trinity with God's attributes. Abelard's ideas were condemned by the synod of Soissons in 1121 and by the Pope himself in 1141.

The second and most important un-orthodox part of Petrus definition of the Trinity is the complete destruction of the equality between the different *personae* of the Trinity. According to the regular dogma of the Catholic Church, all three *personae* have an equal relation to God's substance, whereas in the description of Petrus, only the Father is identical with God's substance. Therefore, the Son and the Holy Spirit are relegated to the role of some particular attribute of the Father. Consequently, this opinion may be seen as an example of the Subordinationism heresy, according to the post-Nicene Catholic Church.

Petrus expressed his criticism of the Jewish practical obligations in the fourth and twelfth chapters of his *Dialogue*. In the fourth chapter, Petrus argues that the observance of the religious injunctions contained in the Law of Moses cannot lead to the fulfilment of God's will. Petrus gives two arguments: Firstly, if God had wanted the Jews to be able to practice all of His Law, he would not have exiled them from their land to a place where they cannot fulfil important parts of this Law. Secondly, even according to the opinion of the Jews, the Law of Moses continues to be necessary for human salvation, yet after the exile, they cannot fulfil all of the commandments contained in the Law and, therefore, cannot be saved. The conclusion is that the Jews "had to guard the legal institution not according to the letter that kills but according to the life-giving spirit".<sup>7</sup>

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LACARRA (ed.), *Diálogo contra los judíos / Pedro Alfonso de Huesca*; introducción de John Tolan; texto Latino de Klaus-Peter Mieth, Huesca 1996, p. 104.

7 Petrus Alfonsi probably wrote his *Dialogus* around the year 1110. – On the condemnation of Abelard, see JEFFERY E. BROWER, "Trinity," in: JEFFERY

In the twelfth and last chapter of his *Dialogus*, Petrus analyses a list of Jewish obligations, and maintains that while having a certain role in the pre-salvation period; they are obsolete after the coming of Jesus (Christ). He concentrates his criticism on the following commandments: circumcision, Shabbat, Passover, the fast of the Day of Atonement, the sacrifices, and the dietary laws. For example, the aim of circumcision was to distinguish the Jewish people from the other nations. After the coming of Jesus and the salvation of all humanity through baptism and faith, all forms of separation between different nations are obsolete. In the same way, the Passover sacrifice is obsolete, because its unique aim has been supplanted by the symbolism of Jesus's sacrifice<sup>8</sup> to save all humankind. Moreover, after the incarnation, after God effectively has become flesh and blood, no other symbols indicating his future coming – such as the Paschal lamb, according to Christian interpretation and perception – are needed. Petrus also explains that prior to the coming of Jesus; the meat of impure animals had a bad influence on the human body. However, after salvation of humankind had become a reality by way of God's sacrificing himself, impure meat no longer has any negative influence or impact.

## 2. *Abner of Burgos*

Abner of Burgos (Alfonso de Valladolid; c. 1260–1347)<sup>9</sup> was perhaps the most important philosopher among the Spanish-Jewish rabbi-apostates. In

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E. BROWER and KEVIN GUILFOY (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, Cambridge, UK 2004, pp. 223-257; BERTRAND DE MARGERIE, *La trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, Paris 1975, pp. 263-265; ANDRÉ MALET, *Personne et amour dans la théologie trinitaire de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1956, pp. 159-160.

8 “*Figura et similitudē*” in the Latin original; see: LACARRA (ed.), *Diálogo contra los judíos* (note 6), p. 181 (English translation p. 260).

9 On Abner's life, see: SHOSHANA GRAYER GERSHENZON, *A Study of “Teshuvot La-Meharef” by Abner of Burgos* (D.H.L. Diss. Jewish Theological Seminary of America), New York 1984), pp. 6-9; CARLOS NORBERTO SAINZ DE LA MAZA VICIOSO, *Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio del manuscrito LAT 6423 de la biblioteca apostólica vaticana*, Madrid 1989, pp. 144-196; JONATHAN L. HECHT, *The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440* (Ph.D. Diss. New York University), New York 1993, pp. 26-31; ROMAN W. SZPIECH, *From Testimonia to Testimony: Thirteenth-Century Anti-Jewish Polemic and the Mostrador de Justicia of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid* (Ph.D. Diss. Yale University), New Haven 2006, pp. 307-324; YEHUDA SHAMIR, *Rabbi Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas and his Book “Ezer ha-Emunah”*: A Chapter in the History of the Judeo-Christian Controversy (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, vol. 7) (Leiden 1975), pp. 40-64.

the first part of his life, Abner was a Jewish philosopher. However, at the age of 60 (if Pablo de Santa María is a reliable source, in that regard), after years of hesitation, he became a Neo-Platonic Christian.<sup>10</sup>

The first major topics of his theological criticism of Judaism are the Trinity and Incarnation.<sup>11</sup> These are in fact the two major subjects of the philosophical polemical works of Abner. Abner had a very specific approach to the issue of Trinity. In his opinion, it is possible to prove the reality of the Trinity philosophically.<sup>12</sup> He claimed that only the division of the divine source of the world could explain the diversity of the world. The infinite, unlimited power of God (the Father), being אש אכלה, an “all-consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24), would burn the finite, limited matter of the world if it were not for a “transformer” to adapt the divine power to the finitude of matter. This “transformer” is the Son. Abner distinguished here between two parts or aspects of the Son. The “superior” Son is part of the transcendent divinity, while the “inferior” Son is the divine elements in all the different parts of the world. The “transformer” of the divine power and essence is the superior Son.

Regarding the theory of the divine attributes, here too, Abner’s opinion is innovative. He distinguished between those attributes that are the essence of God, and those attributes that are essential to God. The attributes that are the essence of God divide themselves only within the persons of the Trinity. The rest of the attributes are only essential to God, i.e. they could be attributed to any one of the three *personae* separately.

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10 On this development of the philosophy of Abner, see SHALOM SADIK, *The Trinity and Determinism in the Philosophy of Abner of Burgos* (Ph.D. Diss. Ben Gurion University), Beer Sheva 2011; YITZHAK BAER, “תורת הקבלה במשנתו,” in: *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), pp. 278-289; FRITZ (JIZCHAK) BAER, “Abner aus Burgos,” in: *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins zur Gründung und Erhaltung einer Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 9 (1926), pp. 20-37, and GRAYER GERSHENZON, *Study of “Teshuvot La-Meharef”* (note 9), pp. 120-167. Some scholars after Yitzhak Baer posited that Abner was a kabbalist before his conversion. It is my sense that this position is based essentially on a misunderstanding of the Christian Neo-Platonic position of Abner, which makes him superficially appear to be a kabbalist. On the critiques of this opinion see SZPIECH, *From Testimonia to Testimony* (note 9), pp. 541-555; HECHT, *The Polemical Exchange* (note 9), pp. 471-480, and SHALOM SADIK, “האם ר' אבנ"ר הוא אבנר מבורגוס?,” in: *Kabbalah* 22 (2010), pp. 331-348.

11 On this subject, see SADIK, *Trinity and Determinism* (note 10), pp. 41-165.

12 The majority of Christian philosophers in the Middle Ages believed that the only option is to prove the possibility of the Trinity. For example, see. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, book IV, chapter 1.



Abner's opinion on the divine incarnation was also very innovative. According to him, the essence of God is in the entire world. The world is composed only of matter and of divine essence in different degrees of purity. Even the most corrupted matter still contains some divine essence in itself. The divine essence gives the corporeal form to matter and produces the dimensions within it.<sup>13</sup> The uniqueness of a human being is the capacity to purify one's matter, thereby reaching a higher degree of divine essence. According to Abner, what made Jesus unique among human beings was that he was born of the highest matter, enabling him to unite with the highest degree of divine essence that a human can attain. Abner thought that the superior Son does not incarnate in this world. Jesus was only the highest degree of the inferior Son that is present in the essences of the entire world.<sup>14</sup>

The opinion of Abner on Incarnation is closely related to his view of the doctrine of original sin. In Abner's opinion, the reason for the original sin was Adam's lack of comprehension. Adam thought that his intellect, which is an incarnation of divinity in people, was God, and he therefore wrongly concluded that he was God. In order to fix Adam's error, humanity needed the Torah, which emphasized the unity of God in an exaggerated form and therefore explained (somewhat inaccurately) that God does not incarnate in the world at all. Only after this critical step, humanity was able to understand that, though there is divinity in humans, this divinity is not an independent God, but rather a part of the divine essence in the whole world. Despite agreeing with this teaching, Abner, like the major trend of the Christian theologians, firmly believed that the Law of Moses, which came to purify the world from idolatry, nevertheless has some limitations. It does not enable the full emancipation of humanity from sin and error. Abner claimed that the absolute negation of the incarnation of God in the world leads to negating the possibility of life after death. The possibility of life after death comes from understanding the incarnation of divinity in all humans. Since Abner understood the Torah as rejecting all forms of such divine incarnation, he saw it as a negation of life after

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13 On the opinion of Abner on prime matter, see SHALOM SADIK, "ביקורת המדע  
האריסטוטלי של ר' חסדאי קרשקש וספרו האבוד של אבנר מבורגוס  
pp. 133-155.

14 On the opinion of Ramón Lull on this subject, see HARVEY J. HAMES, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (The Medieval Mediterranean. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453, vol. 26), Leiden 2000, pp. 190-246, especially pp. 238-245.

death, a negation that however unintentional causes immorality. The Torah has to endure all these inaccuracies in order to achieve its main goal, which is taking humanity out of the sin of idolatry, which to reiterate was accomplished by teaching a dogmatic approach to the utter unity of God. This philosophical outcome, though better than its predecessor (the state of idolatry), ultimately creates a lost situation from the standpoint of salvation – a situation which humanity cannot overcome on its own. It was to remedy this inaccessibility to salvation, argues Abner, that God sent Jesus, whom, being born with a higher degree of matter and divine essence, presented a situation where believers could understand the existence of Incarnation. Due to the level of the divinity within Jesus, his miracles and his resurrection, people are able to understand that within everything in the world there is some divine essence that is part of the inferior Son, and that the origin of all the divinity in the world is the superior Son. This understanding enables salvation from the original sin and represents a true understanding of the relation between God and the world.

We can see that Abner's opinion of Trinity and Incarnation contradicts the generally accepted teaching of the Catholic Church of his time. According to him, the incarnation, the Divine becoming man in Jesus, did not bypass the regular process of the emanation of the divine essence in the world. Rather, the manifestation of Jesus represented the pinnacle of divine incarnation, which, though indeed present in the entire world, in Jesus occurred in the purest form possible. This opinion of Abner, similar to his other philosophical views, was part of his radical Neo-Platonic interpretation of Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

Abner presents his argument for a new Law in the second and third chapters of his *Mostrador*. In these chapters, he essentially argues that the Law of Moses is inferior to the law of Jesus in terms of metaphysical knowledge, and he quotes Jewish sources that speak of the need for a new revelation, because in the time of the Messiah the Law of Moses will be abrogated. He also makes a distinction between the ceremonial and the moral laws within Moses's revelation. According to Abner, only the moral

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15 The difference between Abner and other Neo-Platonic Christian philosophers, like Meister Eckhart, is rooted in the different sources, which influenced them. Unlike Dionysius the Areopagite and Johannes Scotus Eriugena, Abner did not utilize the traditional Neo-Platonic Christian sources. We do not see in any part of Abner's works that he was aware of the existence of these sources. On the other hand, Abner made use of some Arabic and Jewish sources.

laws are eternal, while the ceremonial laws are useful only until the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.<sup>16</sup>

In the tenth<sup>17</sup> and last chapter of his major work, *Mostrador de Justicia* (Master of Justice) Abner's criticism focuses on the practical aspects of the Jewish Law. In this chapter, Abner criticizes the Jewish law and puts forward an argument in favour of the higher level of morality, which the Christian law stands for. The majority of this chapter is comprised of an enumeration of the entire litany of Jewish religious obligations, as exposed in the *Mishneh Torah* of Maimonides. In all the classes of the commandments, Abner argues that the laws of the Christians are better than the religious obligations of the Jew.

Thus, he explained, for example, that after, and due to, God's incarnation, human nature changed and, therefore, the laws concerning (spiritual and ritual) purity and impurity were no longer binding and had to be abrogated.<sup>18</sup> In addition to that, he discussed ethical issues, especially the relation of Jew to members of other religious communities,<sup>19</sup> including the degree of proof that Talmudic law demands in order to condemn a Jew vs. a non-Jew, and the permission that Jews may loan on interest to non-Jews but not to their Jewish brethren.<sup>20</sup>

Otherwise than Pablo and Jerónimo, Abner does not mention the term "natural law", but assumes that there is a general morality that is of natural authority. My impression is that the major reason that he does not mention this term was his very weak knowledge of Christian philosophy. In Judeo-Arabic philosophy, the term "natural morality" or "Law of Nature" is almost non-existent. Contrary to that, in both Christian and pagan Latin literature it constitutes a very important subject.

### 3. *Pablo de Santa María*

Shelomo (Salomon) ha-Lewi – later known as Pablo de Santa María – was born in Burgos around 1353. Still a Jew, he was one of the major rabbis of a city that itself was considered one of the more important communities in Old Castile. After years of vacillation, he eventually converted to Christi-

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16 *Mostrador de Justicia* II, vol. I, p. 95. On this subject, see also *Mostrador de Justicia* X, vol. II, pp. 353-355, 390.

17 See pp. 346-445 of the Mettman edition. This is the longest chapter in the book.

18 *Mostrador de Justicia* X, 7, vol. II, pp. 401-402.

19 *Mostrador de Justicia* X, 7, vol. II, pp. 363-364.

20 *Mostrador de Justicia* X, 7, vol. II, pp. 399-400.

anity in 1390. Years later, he went to Paris to study theology and became a friend of Bishop Pedro du Luna (the later anti-pope Benedict XIII). After his return to Castile, Pablo was appointed Bishop of Cartagena and subsequently Bishop of Burgos. He was also very active in the political life of the church and of Spain.<sup>21</sup> Pablo's two major religious books are his *Additiones* to the commentary of Nicolas de Lyra on the Bible,<sup>22</sup> and his polemical *Scrutinium scripturarum* (The Scrutiny of the Scriptures). The question of Trinity is dealt with at the end of the first part and the beginning of the second part of Pablo's *Scrutinium scripturarum* and in some paragraphs of his *Additiones*.

Pablo was probably the only *converso*-rabbi who after his conversion acquired truly in-depth Christian theological knowledge. He was also the only intellectual *converso* whose position on the Trinity reflected contemporary Christian theological thinking about this subject. At the end of the first part of his *Scrutinium scripturarum*, Pablo (like Thomas Aquinas in the introduction to, and the beginning of, the fourth part of his *Summa contra Gentiles* as well as in the introduction to the book) argues that it is impossible to prove philosophically the existence of the Trinity. Therefore, Pablo only tries to establish the philosophical possibility of the Trinity. The second step of his argument is the scriptural proof of the existence of the Trinity, which he presents in the second part of his *Scrutinium scripturarum*.

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21 Pablo was a member of the council that ruled Castile after the death of the king Enrique III, and one of the major supporters of Pedro de Luna (as Benedict XIII anti-pope in Avignon) in Castile and Aragon. After Pedro de Luna's flight from Avignon to Spain, he belonged to those ecclesiastic leaders who convinced the kings of these two countries to remain loyal to the (former) pope of Avignon. Pablo's break of association with Pedro de Luna in 1415 was one of the main reasons for the return of Castile to Rome, the recognition of the new pope Martin V, and the end of the great schism. – On Pablo de Santa María see: JAVIER MARTINEZ DE BEDOYA, *La Segunda Parte del "Scrutinium Scripturarum" de Pablo de Santa María: "El Diálogo Catequético"* (Thesis ad Doctoratum in Sacra Theologia), Roma 2002, pp. 23-32, and 379; JEAN SCONZA, *History and Literature in Fifteenth-Century Spain: An Edition and Study of Pablo de Santa María's Siete edades de mundo*, Madison 1991, pp. 9-13; FRANCISCO CANTERA BURGOS, *Alvar Gracia de Santa María y su familia de conversos, Historia de la Judería de Burgos y de sus conversos más egregios*, Madrid 1952, pp. 33-274; LUCIANO SERRANO, *Los conversos D. Pablo de Santa María y D. Alfonso de Cartagena. Obispos de Burgos, gobernantes diplomaticos y escritores*, Madrid 1942, pp. 9-118.

22 DEEANA COPELAND KLEPPER, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, PA 2007.

In general, in his religious writings Pablo's emphasis is not on philosophical or theological speculation, but rather on scriptural considerations. As to the question of the definition of Trinity, Pablo based his argument essentially on Thomas Aquinas, whose position he simplifies.<sup>23</sup>

Pablo presents his criticisms of the Law of Moses in the eighth part of the first chapter of the *Scrutinium scripturarum*. In this dialogue, Pablo uses essentially the same argument that Abner used previously: he quotes some Jewish sources that affirm the changing of the Law in the time of the Messiah and then determines that the Law of Moses was appropriate just for a specific period in history. He also adopts, in the manner of Abner and Thomas Aquinas, the distinction within the religious obligations of the Law of Moses between the ephemeral ceremonial commandments and the eternal moral commandments.<sup>24</sup> Pablo also adopted from Aquinas the notion of natural law<sup>25</sup> and claims that only the Christian Law is natural and therefore eternal. By contrast, the Law of Moses is only ceremonial and consequently limited to a specific time, people and geographic area.<sup>26</sup> In the third part of the second chapter of his polemical work, he also argues that one of the major aims of the sacrifices is to symbolize the future sacrifice of Jesus, and as such, after his coming, these sacrifices are rendered obsolete.

#### 4. Jerónimo de Santa Fé

Jerónimo de Santa Fé (born Yehoshua ha-Lorki)<sup>27</sup> lived in Aragon at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (approx-

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23 For example, he does not mention the theory of the analogy in his opinion on God attributes. On Aquinas opinion on Trinity, see ROBERT L. RICHARD, *The Problem of an Apologetical Perspective in the Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Analecta Gregoriana, vol. 131-132), Rome 1963 (especially on the problem of the impossibility to prove the Trinity); SHERWIN KLEIN, "Plato's Parmenides and St. Thomas's Analysis of God as One and Trinity," in: *The Thomist* 55 (1991), pp. 229-244 (especially pp. 238-244).

24 *Scrutinium scripturarum* I, VIII, 12, pp. 265-267

25 This notion is quite ancient, and one of his major sources for it is the seventh chapter of the fifth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethic*. However, Pablo's discussion of natural law depends more on Aquinas's comprehensive "Treatise on the Law" (*Summa theologiae* I-II, Q. 90-114).

26 *Scrutinium scripturarum* I, VIII, 6, pp. 253-256.

27 On his life and work, see: MOISES ORFALÍ, "Jerónimo de Santa Fé y la polémica cristiana contra el Talmud," in: *Annuario di studi ebraici* 10 (1980-1984): pp. 157-178; MOISES ORFALÍ, *El Tratado de Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmud de Jerónimo de Santa Fé*, Madrid 1987; LEO LANDAU, *Das apologetische Schreiben des*

mately 1373–1419). He was the physician of the anti-pope Benedict XIII (the former Bishop Pedro de Luna), of whom Jerónimo requested the organizing of a disputation with the Jews. Therefore, it was that Jerónimo became the main Christian speaker in the dramatic as well as traumatic Disputation of Tortosa (1413–1414).<sup>28</sup> In connection with this disputation, Benedict XIII asked Jerónimo to put down his arguments in writing, and this led to the creation of two polemical works. One of them, the *Errores y Falsedad del Talmud*, exists also in a Latin translation (*De Judæis Erroribus ex Talmuth*) and is primarily an attack on the Jewish oral law, as the title suggests. The second treatise actually does not have a clear name or title; the various editions appeared under different titles, though it is generally known as *Contra perfidiam Judaeorum*. In this work, Jerónimo mainly dealt with questions related to the definition and nature of the Messiah, as well as issues related to the coming of the Messiah. The fifth chapter of this book addresses the question of the essence of the Messiah, and consists almost entirely of interpretations of Biblical passages and the Jewish Oral Law that are supposed to convince a Jew that the Messiah is of divine nature, despite his being a man of flesh and blood. In this book like in all other of Jerónimo's polemical works, philosophical arguments are completely absent. The probable reason for this phenomenon is that Jerónimo believed that all the difference between Judaism and Christianity depended on the question of the coming of the Messiah.<sup>29</sup> In his opinion, all other philosophical controversies would be resolved by themselves, provided that the Jews accept that the Messiah has already come.

Moving on to his more practical and political objections to Judaism, we find that Jerónimo dedicated the ninth chapter of his book on the Messiah, just as he did in the first and sixth chapter of his *Errores y Falsedad del Talmud*, to the criticism of the Jewish practical obligations.<sup>30</sup>

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*Josua Lorki an den Abtrünnigen Don Salomon ha-Levi* (Antwerpen 1906); CARLOS DEL VALLE RODRÍGUEZ, *Errores y falsedad del Talmud*, Introducción, Madrid 2006, pp. 9-77.

28 On this disputation, see: ANTONIO PACIOS LÓPEZ, *La disputa de Tortosa: Estudio histórico-crítico-doctrinal*, Madrid 1957; FRANK E. TALMAGE, "Trauma at Tortosa: The Testimony of Abraham Rimoch," in: *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985), pp. 379-415; RAM BEN-SHALOM, "ויסנטי פֿרר ובעיית האנוסים על פי יכוח טורטוסה, עדותו של יצחק נתן," in: *Zion* 56 (1991), pp. 1-45.

29 The introduction to his book on the Messiah and *La Disputa de Tortosa*: Actas, session 58, pp. 509-510.

30 He also speaks on this subject in some other places in his works. For exam-

Here he quotes passages from the Oral Law (including some of the lost corpus of Rabbi Moses ha-Darshan (“the Exegete”; the 11<sup>th</sup>-century exegete often quoted by Rashi) and Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* to prove the need for a new law to be given by the Messiah that will improve and amend the Law of Moses. Thus, for example, with reference to *Guide of the Perplexed* III, 32, Jerónimo argues that the sacrifices are just but one step on the way to Israel’s emancipation from idolatry. The final Law, however, will be free of any kind of concession to the idolatrous habits of the past.

In the first chapter of his *Errores y Falsedad del Talmud*, Jerónimo puts forward the idea that the commandments which the Jews were enjoined (based on the Oral Law, especially on Maimonides’ Code and the Talmud itself) contradict the laws of nature. For example, he cites (as Abner did) the ruling that if a group of people jointly commits a murder and, therefore, not any individual group member is liable to account for the death of the murdered, then no group member is to be sentenced and executed.<sup>31</sup>

In the sixth and last chapter of *Errores y Falsedad del Talmud*, the focus of Jerónimo’s criticism is on the relationship of the Jews to the Christians. Here, in this chapter, he gives some examples (some of them are also found in Abner’s discussions) proving the bad treatment of non-Jews Jews are accorded to by their Oral Law. Thus, he criticizes, for example, the interdiction to sell or rent a house to a non-Jew, without noticing that this interdiction is valid and to be observed in the Land of Israel only.

##### 5. *Pedro de la Caballeria*

Pedro de la Caballeria (born Bonafos Caballeria; died 1464) was a member of the Caballeria family, one of the most prominent families of Aragon’s Jewish community. In 1414, upon the Tortosa disputation and under its influence he converted<sup>32</sup> to Christianity and after his conversion, he made a very successful career in the service of the kings of Aragon.

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ple, in the beginning of the second chapter, he gives some examples of cases in which the Oral Law is too tolerant in certain cases of idolatry.

31 bSanh 77a and 88a.

32 He converted with all eight of his brothers except for one. His mother, sisters, and his wife also continued to be Jewish. On the family and his conversion, see JUDIT TARGARONA BORRÁS, “The Dirges of Don Benveniste and Doña Tolosana de la Cavalleria for the Death of Their son Solomon,” in: JONATHAN P. DECTER and MICHAEL CHAIM RAND (eds.), *Studies in Arabic and He-*

My following observations are based on his sole extant work, i.e.: *Zelus Christi contra Iudaeos, Sarracenos et infideles*.<sup>33</sup>

Before dealing with some of Pedro's theological arguments, it should be noted that several times in his *Zelus Christi* he asserts that all religions require to believe in something that is rationally difficult to accept, that the believers have to accept through faith,<sup>34</sup> and the belief in the Trinity, which he discusses mainly in paragraphs 684 to 735 of his polemical book, is a perfect example of that. In accordance with that assumption, Pedro states that Christians can, and have to, believe in the Trinity solely on the authority of the Bible. Subsequently, he presents arguments for the Trinity and the reason to believe in it based exclusively on his interpretation of the Scripture, and not on metaphysical conjecture and speculation. Explaining the concept of Trinity,<sup>35</sup> he is using theological ideas that have some similarity to Augustine's concept of the vestige of Trinity,<sup>36</sup> which holds that the Trinity tends to manifest itself in the world, especially in the human soul.<sup>37</sup> The main difference between his opinion

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*brew Letters in Honor of Raymond P. Scheindlin* (Gorgias précis portfolios, vol. 1), Piscataway, NJ 2007, pp. 213-225.

33 All quotations are taken from the edition of the *Tractatus Zelvs Christi contra Ivdaeos, Sarracenos, & infidels*, Venetijs (Venice): apud Barentium de Baretijs (Barezzo Barezzi), M.D.XCII (1592).

34 For example, *Zelus Christi*, §§ 686-689, 958, and 965, 1050. In the last part of the *Zelus Christi*, Pedro also elucidates the high level of morality of the Christian Law.

35 See especially *Zelus Christi*, §§ 697-702.

36 On this concept in Augustin's thought<sup>1</sup>, see FRANÇOIS BOURASSA, "Théologie trinitaire chez saint Augustin," in: *Gregorianum* 58 (1977), pp. 375-312; 59 (1978), pp. 675-725; SARAH COAKLEY, "Introduction: Disputed Questions in Patristic Trinitarianism," in: *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007), pp. 125-138 (especially pp. 133-134); MATTHEW DREVER, "The Self Before God: Rethinking Augustine's Trinitarian Thought," in: *Harvard Theological Review* 100 (2007), pp. 333-342; MARY T. CLARK, "De Trinitate," in: ELEONORE STUMP and NORMAN KRETZMANN (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Cambridge, UK 2001, pp. 91-102; JEAN LOUIS MAIER, *Les missions divines selon saint Augustin* (Paradosis, vol. 16), Fribourg 1960, especially pp. 178-199; OLIVIER DU ROY DE BLICQUY, *L'intelligence de la foi en la trinité selon Saint Augustin : Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, Paris 1966, especially pp. 359-367 and 432-450; ÉTIENNE GILSON, *Intoduction à l'étude de Saint Augustin*, Paris 1949, especially pp. 359-367; JOHANNES BRACHTENDORF, "... prius esse cogitare quam credere: A Natural Understanding of 'Trinity' in St. Augustine?" in: *Augustinian Studies* 29 (1998), pp. 35-45.

37 Pedro expressly mentions the term vestige (*vestigia*). Like Augustine, he also



and Augustine's Trinitarian thought is that Pedro only speaks of two parts or sectors within the human soul: *amor* and *intellectus*. These two are parallel to the Holy Spirit and the Son, as in Augustine. Pedro never speaks of the third part of the vestige, i.e. the parallel between the Father and memory. It is possible that Pedro intentionally altered or did not understand the Augustinian concept and thought that the *substantia* of God is the vestige of the Father as manifested in memory. This alteration marks a major modification of Augustine's original opinion.

Throughout his polemical work, Pedro devotes a number of discussions to the question of the abrogation of the Law of Moses and its commandments. He first asserts that the Law of Moses does not offer the possibility of life after the death of the body.<sup>38</sup> Several times, he then mentions that, therefore, a new law has to be given in the time of the Messiah.<sup>39</sup> This question of abrogation becomes all the more important, as he explains when it comes to the discussion of the abrogation of certain specific injunctions, which he introduced with the rhetorical question: How can Christians not only neglect, but also declare invalid commandments that even Jesus and his disciples observed? In his argument over the Sabbath,<sup>40</sup> he asserts that all the ritual commandments are nullified after the coming of Jesus. Nevertheless, he accepts that as a remembrance of the Creation, the Sabbath retains its relevance, though after the coming of Jesus, it is more important to remember the miracles he performed or stands for, the incarnation and the resurrection, and therefore the weekly holy day had to move to Sunday. Similarly, he argues in favour of the substitution of circumcision by baptism.<sup>41</sup> And with regard to the dietary laws contained in the Law of Moses, he quotes, like others apostates, certain paragraphs from the Oral Law that mention the nullification of these laws in the Messianic Era.<sup>42</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we encountered five very diverse *conversos* who significantly differed from each other in their respective understanding of the meta-

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believed that there are other vestiges of the Trinity in the world. For example, he cites, like the other apostates before him, the union of the "*intelligentem eius quod intelligentur & intelligentia*" as a symbol of the Trinity (*Zelus Christi*, § 1009).

38 *Zelus Christi*, §§ 125-133.

39 For example, *Zelus Christi*, §§ 427 and 628-640.

40 *Zelus Christi*, §§ 736-778.

41 *Zelus Christi*, §§ 802-810.

42 *Zelus Christi*, §§ 819-825.

physical essence of their new religion. In particular, we found some very dissimilar, even contradictory opinions about the Trinity: Petrus Alfonsi identified the Son and Father with the attributes of Wisdom and Will. God's substance, however, is peculiar to the Father alone. Abner proposed a radical Neo-Platonic view of the Trinity in which a dichotomous Son represents the transformer of the divine essence, which allows that powerful essence to coexist with this world. Pedro proposed an interpretation based on Augustine's concept of the vestige of the Trinity in the world, incorporating some fundamental changes that again assign the Father a different status than the other *personae* of the Trinity. These three positions are quite different from, if not contradicting each other. The almost only similarity between them is that they in turn differ significantly from the accepted dogma of the Christian church. The only rabbi apostate who fully understood and adopted the standard Christian definition of the Trinity was Pablo de Santa María. Finally, Jerónimo de Santa Fé never offered any clear or precise explanation of what he understood by Trinity. Thus, we cannot classify his position properly. What we can determine is that the only commonality between the five apostates with regard to their view of the Trinity is that they accepted the most basic formula of the creed only: one *substantia* (or essence) and three *personae*. This does not contradict my argument about the apostates' differences because the acceptance of an official credo is merely a part of the political definition of a religion, and as says nothing about how different thinkers relate to those creeds nor how they explain their metaphysical implications. Therefore, we see that even in the realm of religion, rituals and language that adherents use to express their beliefs in reality are but a part of their political activity in the broadest sense of the term. It is only with regard to their considered and detailed opinions about their beliefs that we encounter their metaphysical perspective. The five intellectual conversos I have focussed on in this article, completely disagreed about the core of the Christian dogma that they wished to disseminate among their former coreligionists. However, when we look at the political differences between Judaism and Christianity, we see that the five apostates were in accord with all the essential principles. Thus, all of them argue in favour of the abrogation of the religious commandments contained in the Law of Moses using arguments that are quite similar and certainly never contradict each other: They all stress the immorality of the Law of the Talmud; the radical change of humanity after the Incarnation; the time limit set to the applicability of the Law of Moses and the Talmud; and the esoteric meaning of

certain religious injunctions as symbolizing the future coming and sacrifice of Jesus. Some of the apostates addressed all these arguments, while others mentioned certain ones only. In any case, we can conclude that the different apostates share the same definition of the political difference between Judaism and Christianity, but disagree on the metaphysical underpinning of this difference.

Another interesting aspect that we have to mention here despite not having dealt with it properly, that groups socio-politically homogenous can nevertheless be disparate metaphysically, that there are some Jews who continued to remain Jewish rabbis and scholars even though they accepted some of the metaphysical ideas and concepts of the apostates. The most obvious example of this kind of metaphysical crossover is given by Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–c. 1410), who adopted some of Abner's arguments about the idea of Trinity and integrated them into his own interpretation of the Divine, even though he continued to head the Jewish opposition against Christian propaganda in his time.

Given that Abner had decided to remain a Jew, he could have interpreted Judaism, like Crescas, according to his metaphysical opinions without converting to Christianity *per se*. However, probably because of his political revulsion to Judaism and in particular to the ritual commandments, he decided to convert to Christianity.

We can conclude that carefully examining the metaphysical aspects of each *converso*-rabbi's polemic is the key for understanding the philosophical and/or theological opinion of any given *converso*. On the other hand, the ideology of apostasy that was collectively created by the intellectual converts of Medieval Spain was not metaphysical in its nature, but rather a political critique of Judaism that especially focused on its obligatory rituals and practices.