

preaching achieved even greater renown than that of Martínez, sparked a new, although less severe wave of anti-Jewish violence in the Murcia-Valencia area around 1410. The subsequent surge in converts ultimately surpassed even those of 1391, and extended to Castile and Aragon. In this climate, the converso Pablo de Santa María, now Chancellor of Castile, was able to promulgate the *Ordenamiento de Doña Catalina*, which decreed that Jews and Moslems had to wear special identifying badges, could only dress in coarse clothing in public, and could not occupy higher trades and offices, including medicine. The ordinance was unenforceable and generally disregarded, but furthered the anti-Jewish climate. Then in 1414, the schismatic Pope Benedict XIII arrived to personally preside over the famed Disputation of Tortosa. Leading rabbis were forced to defend Jewish belief in the face of a phalanx of Old and New Christian interrogators. Although most accounts indicate the rabbis held their own, the hostile environment led to a further increase in conversion.

Why did such a large number of Jews convert, rather than face martyrdom or find a way to emigrate? The smaller Jewish populations of other parts of Europe in the preceding centuries had often accepted the fate of death rather than conversion. Further, if we accept the obvious point that many of the first conversions were forced (*anusim*, in the Hebrew term for unwilling converts, and there was an acknowledged body of rabbinic sanction for this, including from Maimonides), then

why did not many of the unwilling later find opportunity to re-settle, or otherwise return to Judaism, once the initial spasms of persecution abated—as the persecutions did?

The answer which many recent scholars have derived, including Jewish ones, is that most of the converts were not *anusim*, but *meshumadim*—that is, voluntary converts. True, the 1391 pogroms and continuing hostile climate fostered by Vicente Ferrer's preaching, constituted more than a little "push." But the tremendous numbers who "never looked back" can only be understood in relation to the long and distinguished role Jews had played in the Convivencia environment. They had been involved in matters of culture and economic entrepreneurship for centuries, way beyond those enjoyed by other Jewish groups in Europe. This higher involvement, had loosened the insularity which could feed a martyr's response. And in passing over to becoming Christians, many gained renewed access to cultural, economic, and government functionary activities that were gradually closing down to them as Jews, but which they saw as part of their heritage.

The first half of the 1400s, when this wave of conversions began to work its way into second and third generations of extraordinary achievement, was also the period when the breakthroughs centered in the Italian Renaissance were spreading rapidly into the Iberian Peninsula. The Conversos were among the groups most alive to this new influence.

The Catholic Encyclopedia On Tomás De Torquemada

The following is an excerpt from the current on-line entry of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* on Tomás de Torquemada, a view contrary to the tenets of Pope John Paul II, but a demonstration of how active certain unreconstructed apologists for a renewed medievalism in the Church are today.

"First Grand Inquisitor of Spain, born at Valladolid in 1420; died at Ávila, 16 September, 1498. . . . The Infanta Isabella chose him as her confessor while at Segovia, and when she succeeded to the throne of Castile in 1474 he became one of her most trusted and influential councilors, but refused all high ecclesiastical preferments, choosing to remain a simple friar.

"At that time the purity of the Catholic Faith in Spain was in great danger from the numerous Marranos and Moriscos, who, for material considerations, became sham converts from Judaism and Mohammedanism to Christianity. The Marranos committed serious outrages against Christianity and endeavoured to judaize the whole of Spain. The Inquisition, which the Catholic sovereigns had been

empowered to establish by Sixtus IV in 1478, had, despite unjustifiable cruelties, failed of its purpose, chiefly for want of centralization. In 1483 the pope appointed Torquemada, who had been an assistant inquisitor since 11 February 1482, Grand Inquisitor of Castile, and on 17 October extended his jurisdiction over Aragon.

". . . The Marranos found a powerful means of evading the tribunals in the Jews of Spain, whose riches had made them very influential and over whom the Inquisition had no jurisdiction. On this account Torquemada urged the sovereigns to compel all the Jews either to become Christians or to leave Spain. . . . Chiefly through his instrumentality the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492.

"Much has been written of the inhuman cruelty of Torquemada. . . . Whether Torquemada's ways of ferretting out and punishing heretics were justifiable is a matter that has to be decided not only by comparison with the penal standard of the fifteenth century, but also, and chiefly, by an inquiry into their necessity for the preservation of Christian Spain. The contemporary Spanish chronicler, Sebastian de Olmedo . . . calls Torquemada 'the hammer of heretics, the light of Spain, the saviour of his country, the honour of his order.' "

by Timothy Rush