

Tudo se ilumina para  
aquele que busca la luz.  
BEN-ROSH

# HALAPID

...alumina-vos e apon-  
ta-vos o cominho  
BEN-ROSH

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## St. Vicente Ferrer and the Anti-Semitism of Fifteen Century Spain

by Ronald J. Duncan

St. Vicente Ferrer (1350-1419) was a Dominican preacher (Orden de Predicadores) from Valencia, Spain who played a critical role during the events of the late 1300's and early 1400's that led to the forced conversions of thousands of Jews and the massacres of others. When Ferrer was forty years old, he launched a campaign against Judaism with the purpose of eliminating it from Spain, and over the next three decades he came close to achieving it. He was canonized because he was an eloquent preacher who stirred Christians to dedicate themselves to their faith and because he was credited as the best evangelist of the age in Spain being responsible for thousands of conversions. On the other hand, Ferrer's preaching was anti-Semitic, and it engendered violent emotions that turned his followers into mobs that invaded Jewish neighborhoods assaulting Jews, destroying property, and even killing people. An integral element to his success as an evangelist was the intimidation created by the gang behavior of his followers.

Ferrer's first campaign against Jews came in 1390 when he was caught up in the wave of anti-Semitic movements that were sweeping Spain at the time. That year he went on an evangelizing mission to Castile accompanied by Cardinal Pedro de Luna, who was later elected Pope Benedict XIII. The two of them were to lead the anti-Semitic forces in Spain over the next three decades, each re-enforcing the other. Ferrer's incendiary preaching against the Jews and Judaism in this crusade through Castile was a part of the environment of odium that led to the 1391 assaults on Jewish communities in which thousands of Jews were killed, the worst pogroms ever in Christian Spain. In some cities the entire Jewish population was either killed, forced to convert, or fled the city, completely eliminating the Jewish presence. This experience seems to have honed Ferrer's vision that it was in fact possible to eradicate Judaism in Spain.

During the 1390's and early 1400's Ferrer was credited with the conversion of many Jews, including some who were outstanding leaders in their communities. Šelomo ha-Levi was one of these leaders, the respected rabbi of Burgos who converted along with several other members of his extended family. He took the baptismal name of Pablo de Santa María and in later years went on to become the Chancellor of the government of Castile. He remained an ally of Ferrer, and when he was Chancellor, they collaborated in formulating the restrictive laws on Jewish communities. Ferrer was also credited with the conversion of Šemuel Abrabanel, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Seville. The conversion of important figures like these caused a crisis among Spanish Jews, weakening the faith of their followers and leading to further conversions.



Many of these converts, known as *anusim* or "the forced ones," took on Christianity simply as a protective shield to fend off the threats to their lives, livelihoods, and families; however, some went further and even joined the anti-Semitic forces themselves. Ferrer had established his credentials as an evangelist, but he had done so in the environment of

violent anti-Jewish pogroms. In the early 1400s, he began elaborating a plan to crush the *aljamas*, or Jewish communities, that had survived the genocidal attacks of 1391. His plan was to ghettoize Jews and remove them completely from contact with Christians.

In 1406, Ferrer was in Castile advocating his plan against the Jews with Queen Catalina and Fernando de Antequera who was assisting her. Eventually, his ideas, along with those of other anti-Semitic leaders, were enacted into a set of laws between 1408 and 1412 that essentially destroyed the Jewish way of life. These laws culminated in the Ordinances of Valladolid, promulgated in 1412, which raised anti-Semitic restrictions to a new height. The limited political autonomy that the *aljamas* had experienced in the fourteenth century was revoked, meaning that Jews could no longer judge themselves nor make decisions about the preservation of their communities. Jews were no longer allowed to work in governmental or judicial offices of Castile, nor provide services to Christians as doctors, pharmacists, surgeons, barbers, blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, butchers, leather workers, or other occupations. This was a major blow

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to livelihood because the educated elite frequently worked in the administrative, financial, and judicial branches of government and the commoners worked in the crafts. At this time Jews constituted approximately ten percent of the population of Spain, and these laws prohibited them from working with the ninety percent of Christians. Limited to working only within the Jewish neighborhoods, they were stripped of the possibility of economic success. These laws would reduce Jews to poverty, demeaning their status in the society.

Ferrer's plan forced Jews to move out of their houses in the towns where they would have contact with Christians and move into isolated ghetto barrios on the edge of town so Christians would be insulated from them. Ferrer's idea of quarantining the Jews was designed to eliminate or minimize friendship, intermarriage, or other social contexts through which their "infidel" beliefs or influences might affect Christians, especially new Christians, the *anusim*. Making Jews a socially isolated group also meant there would be less empathy with them as a people, laying the basis for more restrictive legislation in the future. He successfully urged Queen Catalina to order this separation of Jews from the Christians in the Kingdom of Castile, and subsequently Jews were forcibly moved to the new "barrios." This was frequently done even though there were no houses or even basic services. Ferrer's plan set the Jews apart as exile communities within their own towns, a situation that anticipated the Expulsion.

In subsequent years Jewish ghettos were set up throughout Castile, Aragón, and other kingdoms, and Jews lived as a separate people in Spain from that time until the final Expulsion. They could no longer dress in fine attire and were limited to the most modest clothes of the poor. Men were required to grow their beards and hair long in traditional Jewish fashion, and no one could use Christian names. Jews could not hire Christians to work for them, nor attend Christian weddings or funerals, nor bring arms into town. Jews were prohibited from moving to any other kingdom where these rules were not in effect. They were specifically denied the right to travel to North Africa where Jewish communities were thriving under Islam because of the fear that they would be forever lost as candidates for conversion to Christianity. These restrictive measures devastated the economies of the Jewish communities and severely affected the overall economy of Castile to the extent that some measures were later scaled back.

In 1410 Ferrer intervened to have of Fernando de Antequera elected as king of Aragón and traveled with him to his new kingdom to oversee the implementation of the anti-Semitic laws there. By 1412 the laws had been enacted, and it was recorded that they were so intimidating to the Aragonese Jews that they were afraid to walk in the streets of the capital, Zaragoza. King Fernando I sought to calm the hostile passions that were aroused among the Aragonese Christians with another edict which ordered them to treat Jews benignly according as they traditionally had done. He also ordered that if Vicente Ferrer said anything against the protection of the Jews in his sermons that it should be reported to him, the King. In spite of enacting these restrictive laws the King was still protecting the

Jewish communities against the Church. Royal protection of the Jewish community was frequently all that kept them alive, and it occurred repeatedly throughout the kingdoms of Spain. However, the pressure of Ferrer and the anti-Semitic forces would soon eclipse this royal defense of the Jews.

During 1411 and 1412 Ferrer traveled throughout Castile and Aragón in evangelistic crusades. As usual he attracted large crowds with his eloquent preaching, and his messages focused on the need of Christians to purify their faith and to eliminate the unchristian influence of the Jews. Although he is on record saying that he was against forced conversions and bloodshed, he had to make those clarifications because the results of his preaching spoke otherwise. After his sermons the Christian mobs repeatedly attacked the Jews, robbing them and physically beating them. Many were killed. He attracted bands of flagellants, who whipping themselves into religious frenzies with chains, forced their way into Jewish neighborhoods, threatening the local Jews if they did not convert. Christian sources blamed

these attacks on criminal elements who took advantage of these disturbances to sack the Jewish quarters. However, backed up by these throngs, Ferrer obligated Jews to listen to his sermons denouncing their religious traditions and labeling them as a threat to Christianity. In some towns Ferrer entered synagogues and forcefully converted the buildings into Christian churches. One such synagogue was in Toledo, later renamed Santa María la Blanca which is still owned by the Church. Many others that were forcefully converted to churches at that time still exist as churches today.

In Aragón Ferrer joined forces with his old friend Pedro de Luna who was now Pope Benedict XIII having been elected by the Avignon court during the schism with Rome. The Pope had established his court in the Aragonese kingdom and was living there. The Pope's personal doctor was a Jewish physician, Yosuha Lorquí, who was well respected in the kingdom. Lorquí already had doubts about his faith, and Ferrer was able to persuade him to become a Christian. After which he assumed a new Christian name as

Geronimo of Santa Fe. Ferrer stayed near the papal court and as in 1390 the collaboration between Ferrer and de Luna soon led to a confrontation with Jews. In 1413 the Pope ordered the *aljamas* of Aragón and Cataluña to send two to four of their rabbis to the papal court at Tortosa to receive instruction in Christian beliefs. With the collaboration of Geronimo de Santa Fe, he set up the famous Debate, or Disputation, in Tortosa between Christians and Jews on the doctrine of the Messiah. Geronimo, the new convert, led the debate on the Christian side, using his detailed knowledge of the Talmud and Midrash to argue against Jewish beliefs. In Tortosa, the rabbis were not allowed to leave, and the debate continued for months. Pressure was brought on the rabbis and followers to convert, and some did. Eventually the debate ended, and the Christian forces claimed they had won. Taking advantage of that moment, Pope Benedict XIII decided to push for the conversion of all of the Jews of Aragón.

King Fernando I chose to avoid confrontation with the Pope and took a neutral stance on the issue since he had been named



Dominican priest preaches to Jews

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Art Benveniste

Last week Randy Baca, our capable membership chair, informed me that our paid membership had passed the 100 mark and was still growing. As we went to press, the count was 108. We are well on our way to a new membership record, but, equally as important, we are increasing the number of people who actively contribute to our work. Our board members are hard at work, sending out membership letters, tallying dues, organizing our San Diego conference facilities, screening papers for presentation and collecting articles for *HaLapid* and mailing the newsletter. Almost every week someone who has discovered some family practice that causes him or her to believe that they have a crypto-Judaic background contacts one of us. Not long ago I received a call from a staff person at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel. Norma Waggoner, who wanted information on Crypto Jews, had approached her. She was referred to me; the result is the very interesting article on page four of this issue. By chance a friend of mine met Ronald Duncan; while speaking to him she found that he had done research on Vicente Ferrer. She introduced him to me and, as a result, we have the article on page one of *HaLapid*. While I spoke with Ron, I learned that his daughter is Vanessa Paloma, the fine singer of Sephardic songs. Vanessa may be our entertainer in August in San Diego.



Art Benveniste

The story of the crypto Jews is spreading. In February and March, the Mexican/American group *Sinergia* presented the play *In The Name Of God* at the Freda Kahlo Theater in Los Angeles. The play presents the story of the Carvajal family, crypt Jewish founders of Nuevo Leon in Mexico, who were arrested, tortured and executed by the Inquisition in Sixteenth Century Mexico. The performances, with actors mostly of Mexican/Catholic descent, were presented in English one night and Spanish the next. In June, The Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles will begin an exhibition on Jewish Pioneers of the Western United States. They want to include a section on crypto Jews and have contacted Stan Hordes and me for assistance. A preview of the exhibition will begin with Harriet Rochlin's talk on her new book on Pioneer Jewish Women. Several institutions have expressed interest in obtaining subscriptions to *HaLapid*. We have received requests from The Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, Rutgers University in New Jersey, the New York Public Library, Hebrew Union College -Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, and Hadassah Magazine. They will all be added to our mailing list.

Please try to accompany us as we grow. Make sure that your dues are paid and join us in San Diego in August.

## 2002 California Conference

### San Diego, California

By Gloria Trujillo

This year's conference is August 11-13, and will be held at the Marriott Mission Valley Hotel. The registration form is included on page eleven. Registration covers all conference costs including two dinners and one lunch. Please join us before the conference on Monday and Tuesday morning to start the day with a continental breakfast, also included in the registration. This is a great time to meet and chat with new and old friends.

The conference room rate is \$89.00 for single, double or triple rooms, so please be sure to call and make your reservations by Friday, July 12 to take advantage of this special rate. Sandy Pendleton, the Marriott's Senior Sales Manager will be happy to assist you. The hotel has a fabulous pool, and the Rio San Diego trail, adjacent to the hotel, is great for walkers.

If you are driving, you can also take advantage of a special daily and overnight parking rate of \$4.00. The Blue Line Trolley is accessible from the hotel, which is good news for those of who aren't driving. The Blue Line takes you into Downtown San Diego where you can shop or sightsee, or connect to the Orange line to get around the City.

We would especially like to thank our local chair, Rabbi David Kunin for his hard work in helping us get the special rates at the Marriott. We appreciate the effort and time he devoted into getting us into the Marriott. Good news: Rabbi Kunin is planning a special Shabbat service at Ohr Shalom Synagogue on Friday, August 9.

By David Kunin

San Diego, the site of the 2002 annual conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies is an ideal city for the meeting. Not only is San Diego a beautiful city on the California seacoast, with many tourist attractions. It is also a crossroads of the Americas. Located on the USA - Mexican border, it is a city which combines the cultures of both nations. It is a city where Spanish and English vie as the language of choice. It is also a city with historical sites dating to the early years of the Spanish Empire, recalling the times when the ancestors of today's crypto Jews fled to the backwaters of the Spanish world.

The San Diego Jewish community is as diverse as the city itself. At Jewish communal events, Mexican Spanish and English with a South African accents are nearly as common as North American English. Synagogues of all denominations, including one whose population includes largely crypto Jews, are found throughout the region. San Diego's Jewish community is a vibrant mix of Mexican and American, Ashkenazi and Sephardi cultures and traditions.

There will be special tours of San Diego before and during the conference. These will include a tour of Jewish (and historic) San Diego and a trip to Tijuana.

Ohr Shalom Synagogue, is proud to be hosting the Conference. Ohr Shalom's membership is about half Anglo and half Mexican Jews. Conference participants are invited to join us for services on the Shabbat before the conference. We will hold a special Sephardic/Crypto Jewish weekend of events, including speakers, discussions, and a Sephardic dinner. For more information contact me at (619) 275-9299.

OUR WEBSITE HAS BEEN UPDATED

VISIT IT AT:

<http://sephardiconnect.com/halapid/halapid.htm>

## FINDING MY PAST

By Norma Waggoner

*And Adonai went ahead of them in a column of cloud during the daytime to lead them on their way, and at night in a column of fire to give them light; thus they could travel both day and night. Neither the column of cloud by day nor the column of cloud at night went away from in front of the people . . . (Exodus-Sh' mot 13:21-22)*

The story I am about to share is the story of a life G-d has wanted to use. No, this life is not deserving of the blessing of G-d, but out of His graciousness He has brought it all to be!

My story starts in a small Los Angeles town. El Sereno to be exact, a community of Italians, Hispanics, and some Anglos. In what is now East Los Angeles, my Egypt. My grandmother calls to me from the back house where she lives, I come running with my braids hitting the sides of my face as I bounce towards her. She calls me to assist her with a ritual she does almost everyday. She is done draining the meat and she would like to have my help. "Grandma, why don't we just pour the blood down the drain?" I say. But she says in her native tongue. "Mija, it would become unclean." I don't understand her meaning, but I help and we walk side-by-side carrying the large black enamel pot between us. She tells me to get the small garden shovel and dig her a hole near our apple tree. And I do it, eager to go play. When her hole is dug, she spills the contents of her pot into the moist dirt and says some words that I can barely hear. She is saying an old phase she says as we do this ritual almost everyday. She pours the blood and water out into the hole. Then she recites a prayer "From life to life." She says it ever so low as to keep it a secret between her and G-d but I know she is speaking, for her lips are parting ever so slightly. "Cover it up mija. And put that away." I run to do what I'm told and go to play.

And so my grandmother with her strange little quirks goes inside. She is a small-framed woman with a simple black and white checkered dress and her black nylons and black shoes. She always wore black everything, even her head shawl was black. Except the beautiful tortoise shell hair comb she had which she wore on her silky pepper grey hair. My grandmother was a very religious person and who would think she would dwell in the halls of my mind forever? Who would know that she was practicing a 500-year-old custom that was taught to her by her ancestors? Who would have recognized the things she did as Jewish? My mother would say, "Your grandmother is always doing *brewhadia*," even though my mother did some *brewhadia* of her own.

Looking back, it all makes sense, all that my grandmother did. It has been the beginning of an Exodus for me. Now I am 37 years old and the past has come to haunt me, not in a way that has been frightening, but in a way that has put some puzzle pieces together.

I began my journey a year ago while attending a messianic congregation. Why a messianic congregation, you ask? Well I wanted the meat of the bible and I knew that the bible was a Jewish book, written by Jewish men, written in a Jewish tongue, and about a Jewish messiah, then what better place to go! A Jewish messianic congregation was the place to be! I had been going to a Christian church and that was fine, but I felt a drawing to the messianic people and the G-d of Israel. I wanted to learn about this very Jewish G-d and His

people; unfortunately, my church knew nothing of its Jewish roots and it wasn't teaching it either. How, I wondered, could we have the Jewish messiah and not care for His people? Read his book and ignore His people? And how could we Americanize Him and forget how Israeli He was? He was a Sabra, a native of Israel!

Needless to say I met G-d later at a synagogue, His Torah and His people, and it was an awesome experience. When I first walked through the doors I was met by a beautiful sea of white. The men were wearing tallit or prayer shawls. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. That sea of white took my breath away. It was as if I was transported back in time to the first century church of the apostles. I sat down not really paying attention to the service because I was mesmerized by the scene I was in. This was different from the church I had gone to and rightly so, I was in a very Jewish place! But I didn't expect this beautiful element. This sea of white! The building was full of Hebrew chants and prayers, which I did not understand, but produced a poetic melody in the air. Then I noticed a large closet of some kind behind the *bima* where the cantor was. It was large with a light placed above it to the side. Two men were called to come up. They went to the closet, opened it and slid a burgundy curtain aside. There was this ancient scroll, dressed in a beautiful blue covering which had an embroidered star of David with lions holding what seem to be the ten commandments. It was beautiful! It also had a silver crown on it and a breastplate around the top of it hanging in front. They removed the scroll with such care. Then

they began a procession with the scroll around the congregation. I was excited because I knew I was going to get a better look at this object. Everyone followed the scroll never taking his or her eyes off it. People touched it with their bibles and the men touched it with their fringes on their *tallits*. Then there I was face to face with this ancient piece of history that was so beautiful to me. I extended my bible and touched it and brought it back to my lips and kissed the Son as in Psalm 12:22. Tears welled up in my eyes and I didn't understand why. But I knew I was happy and I had a sense of home.

Later in the week I was invited to the home of a Jewish Sephardi family to have Shabbat with them. I was so excited that they were welcoming me into their home. When I got there, we began the Kiddush and it was so reminiscent of the times I had spent with my grandmother on Friday nights. She would call us over as the sun was going down; my parents never came but they always made sure we went to Grandma's. She would have her table adorned with a beautiful white *mantel* as she called it. She would also have two candleholders placed somewhere in the middle with white little candles. She would place her hands on my head and on my brother's and recite something in Spanish. I do remember her saying *Adonai* and *Señor* and *Nuestros Padres* and as soon as it started it was over. My brother and I would run outside and go play before the day would escape us. She would let the candles burn out; I knew this because I could see the glow through her windows as they burned. I would sometimes wonder why she even lit candles, but when I questioned it, I was always told that it was cause we were Catholic. I would shrug my shoulders, anyway



Norma Waggoner

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I was just nine or ten at the time, maybe even younger and my thoughts were always somewhere else.

After the Kiddush at my friend's home, Miriam, Marks wife, introduced me to her son-in-law Tony. After exchanging "hello" he asked if I were Jewish. I said "no" and he asked if I was sure? I was surprised that he questioned me again. I said, "Aren't all Jews from Europe? Do I look European to you?" He said that he was Sephardic. I had never heard that term. I asked him to explain. He told me it meant that he was a Jew from Spain. Wow, what a concept, I thought all Jewish people were white. How ignorant I must have sounded!

We continued to talk and he said he wanted to show me something on the computer. So we went to the office and he began clicking away. I asked, "Where are you taking me?" He said "Spain." He actually took me to a sight called 'Sephardim.com.' It was very interesting! I read the inquisition edict, and that was really a mind blower to me! I told Tony that we were taught that the inquisition was to tame the savage Indians in America. He said "You would change history too if your hands were stained with blood!" I had to think about that one for a while. He then asked what my grandparents' names were. "Why would you want to know that?" I asked. He said, "Just tell me, what are you afraid of?" That was a challenge so I told him. Rodriguez, Martinez, Vasquez, Luna.

He said that those names were Sephardic and that we would find them here. I said that the writer of the site said in his intro that a name didn't mean that you were Sephardic and then I sat back with my arms folded. We went to the rites and rituals page and I was not ready for the shock I was going to receive. As we were scanning the page I couldn't believe my eyes. It was like I was watching my grandmother materialize before my eyes. I couldn't contain myself and I felt a desperate need to run. Tony turned and looked at me and noticed I was not doing well. "What's wrong?" he asked but I could say nothing, I was just shaking and I began to burst into tears. He hugged me and said, "Mazal tov little sister, I knew it!" He then called everyone up stairs and they joined in the hugging and kissing. I broke free and ran downstairs; all I wanted to do was run away. Everyone looked at me and all I could say was "I'm sorry." And I left.

I cried all the way home. I couldn't understand why my family lied to me, why they had told me these were all things a good Catholic does? I then sank into a state of depression for three months! It wasn't because being Jewish was a bad thing, but I felt like Moses! Here he thought he was a part of Pharaoh's court and he finds he's Hebrew! I thought I was going crazy and I felt so alone. What was I going to do? Who would help me? What happens now? I never wanted to take from the Jewish people. Sure I loved them and wanted them to go back to their land, but I did not want to steal their glory or their rights as some people do. And I was afraid I was doing that. That I was a loony grabbing Jewishness out of the air for some kind of self gain. And I definitely didn't want to do that! !! But I was lost.

Then one day I was watching a pastor Ortiz on a channel who was talking about the Sephardic Jews. He gave some history of the valley there in Texas and talked about the Mexican Inquisition. It was very alarming what happened to those poor people—my people? I had a hard time saying that. I did some more crying and a lot of listening. He went on and

shared the names of *conversos*. He explained how they didn't kill the remnant of Jews and that the remnant survives! Some of that remnant was walking around not knowing who they were. What an understatement! I raised my hand as if to say, "Here I am." After that night, I told G-d that if He wanted me to know who I was, then He had better send someone to help me with this because I didn't know where to start! A week later He did! I meet a Sephardic Jew named Dovid Luna, He had more degrees than a thermometer and he had done a twenty-five year study on the name Luna! Wow, what a break! He lived in El Paso and was such a great help. He also introduced me to another man by the name Michael Mosiah Angel who told me how the Angels and the Lunas were in the courts of royalty. I went back to the messianic synagogue. I left for they wanted me to prove my Jewishness all the time, with articles and letters. I began going to a reform temple and they never asked me to prove anything. I loved it! I could be a Jew and worship with Jews, it was and is wonderful! ! ! ! But there is still one thing missing. I would like to be around other Sephardic Jews at a Sephardic temple and share an experience of being with my people.

I'm enclosing a list of the traditions in my home that my family and grandparents did:

1. Covering mirrors when someone died and during certain Holidays such as Lent and Dia de Ester.
2. When someone died children were not allowed to go to the funeral.
3. We ate oven-roasted eggs when someone died and the adults would dip their egg in ashes and we sat on the floor as we did this.
4. When my Uncle Pollo died he had a funeral of a poor man I thought. He was put in a simple wooden pine box with a sheet cloth wrapped around his body and he also had to be buried in twenty-four hours. My mom said it was because they had no refrigeration but mind you these were the late 70's.
5. We had to wear black ribbons and my mom and his wife wore a black piece of material and ripped it.
6. We had to wear black for seven days and could not look at ourselves in the mirror or hear the radio or TV or even laugh. We couldn't even take a shower. You could just wash your hands and teeth and face. Also no make up during this time.
7. After their spouse died, older women would wear black for a year.
8. When a child was born, the women would sing and encourage the mother, saying they were protecting her from the evil eye.
9. When a baby was born it was given a pin to wear to ward off the evil eye. The pin was made from a nut that they called "goat's eye." it was brown with a black dash making it look like an eye. It was tied with red ribbon and a safety pin.
10. Babies were also given an amulet that looked like a hand, it was silver and tied with red ribbon.
11. Baby boys were circumcised after birth.
12. During the week of Lent our family could not eat any bread, we ate matzo which I thought was a Spanish word. When I asked my other Catholic friends if they were sick of matzo they would reply. "What's that?" When I would ask my grandmother why I had to eat it if my friends didn't. she would say "Somos muy Católicos" That was her answer for

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dear Editor:

Though ordinarily I do not respond to Letters to the Editor in publications that print my work, I felt that I must reply to Arye Hazary's letter in the Winter, 2002, issue of *HaLapid*. In this instance, the combination of significant misinterpretation of my work and the imputing of particular motives for both my presentations at the annual conference of the Society and my recent article in *HaLapid* necessitate a response.

I am, by profession, a cultural historian, and not a theologian. My essay was an attempt to examine the relationships between Roman Catholicism and crypto Judaism from a cultural historical, not theological, perspective. This seems to have escaped Hazary entirely. I am, of course, aware of the profound theological differences between Judaism and Catholicism. However, there are affinities between various aspects of the ritual and material cultures of both. These have been commented upon at length by other scholars over the last fifty years. It is these, and not theological issues, that I tried to explore in my article.

My work relies on standard approaches to social science, drawn from a variety of sources. If Mr. Hazary wants to challenge my interpretations from the perspective of cultural history, fine. I, like any reputable scholar, welcome debate as a way of refining my own positions. Let him dispute my methodology, or question my sources. Let him produce evidence from the cultural historical literature that calls my interpretations into question. However, fairness demands that he react to the cultural historical essay I wrote **from the perspective of cultural history**, and not from a theological perspective which was never, and is not now, my intention in writing.

More disturbing is the underlying message of Hazary's letter that I have some kind of "hidden agenda" in writing for *HaLapid*, and presumably, for being a member of the Society. His comment about my "cryptically insinuating an agenda" is both insulting and erroneous. Indeed, my "agenda" is so "cryptic" that, as far as I can tell, it exists only in his own mind. I come to the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies as a **scholar**. My only agenda is that of a scholar, to deepen and refine my understandings of historical situations. I recognize that, as the Society's bylaws indicate, it has a responsibility "to support and represent those exploring and seeking to understand their crypto-Judaic identity." I have no particular interest, however, in whether such individuals return to formal Judaism, continue as Roman Catholics with some level of Judaic practice, assimilate into mainstream Catholicism, or are not involved in any formal religious practice at all. For this reason, I find the last paragraphs of his letter rude at best, and hate-mongering at worst. I would also add that my decision to wear a Roman collar when I made my presentation at the last Annual Conference was mine alone to make. As long as I, or anyone else, dress in a seemly fashion, it seems to me highly inappropriate for anyone, including Mr. Hazary, to make discourteous innuendos about it.

Let me make one final point. I am presently an active member of the Association for Israel Studies and of the Middle East Studies Association, both of which deal with Jewish issues. I have published on topics related to Catholicism and Judaism in American, British, and Israeli journals, in both English and Hebrew. I am, by invitation, a member of the Jewish Studies Committee at my university, and have taught modern Jewish history there. I speak frequently at synagogues, Jewish organizations (e.g., American Jewish Commit-

tee), and Hillel Foundation gatherings. I number among my friends the director of the Center for Sephardic Studies at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. In none of these venues have I been subjected to personal attacks of the sort launched by Hazary in his letter, and by an individual at last year's meeting. In every other instance, I have been treated in a personally respectful manner even when my ideas were sometimes challenged within the academic framework of appropriate scholarly criticism and debate. If the organization of which all of us, myself included, are members is indeed the Society for Crypto-Judaic **Studies** (emphasis mine), I believe that I have a right to the same respect at its annual conference and in the pages of its publication.

**F. Michael Perko, S.J., PhD**, Professor,  
Loyola University of Chicago

### Dear Editor:

We are growing increasingly concerned over the ethnocentric and adversarial tone of remarks expressed in such forums as the SCJS annual conference and in the pages of *HaLapid*. Such remarks, it appears to us, are inconsistent with both the mission of the Society, and the call in our bylaws for tolerance and mutual respect for different ideas.

The ad-hominem attack by one of the attendees against Dr. Michael Perko at the 2001 Pueblo Conference was roundly condemned by the group, and rightly so. Similarly, the remarks in a letter to the editor by Arye Hazary in the winter 2002 issue of *HaLapid* appear to us to have stepped over the line of scholarly criticism and into the realm of personal attack, and they merit comment.

Dr. Perko is a well-respected professor of history at a reputable university, and has done considerable research into the history of Judaism, Catholicism and interfaith relations, which he has offered to share with the Society on a number of occasions. The context of the history of the Catholic Church, is one that we find most valuable, and complements that provided by the other scholars who generally participate in our conferences. His presentation was of a social scientific nature, devoid of a theological agenda. At the Pueblo Conference, Dr. Perko examined the historical phenomenon of crypto Judaism from the perspective of the history of the Church, and included helpful insights into the evolution of papal policies toward the Jews over the centuries.

The Society should, and does, welcome critical analysis of conference presenters and authors of articles in *HaLapid*. If Mr. Hazary had confined himself to a critique of Dr. Perko's scholarly observations, his letter would have served as a positive contribution to a healthy debate. Respectful exchange of intellectual ideas is what the Society is all about. However, it seems to us that Mr. Hazary's comments crossed over the line of acceptability, into personal attack and Catholic-bashing.

From the outset, the letter appeared to accuse Dr. Perko of participating in some kind of Catholic propaganda campaign to promote the interests of the Church. The letter's reference to Dr. Perko's wearing of a roman collar seems to imply

that the historical analysis that he offered was somehow diminished. One wonders if the integrity of another professor, who just happened to be a rabbi, presenting a paper on the history of Jewish-Christian relations at a conference on Catholic history, would be similarly questioned, or if his/her wearing of a yarmulke would associate him/her with some kind of Jewish plot. Accusations that Dr. Perko "cryptically insinuates his agenda," of reinforcing conversions that had taken place five hundred years ago, not only misrepresents his views, and trivializes the historical process, but represents, in our view, an attack on the motives and character of Dr. Perko. This kind of abuse has no place, we believe, in the pages of *HaLapid*.

On another level, we are troubled by the "us vs. them" perspective represented by Mr. Hazary's letter – that the Catholic Church historically has represented a force of evil in the world. As scholars of Latin American and Jewish history, we believe that history should not be seen as a morality play, as the forces of good versus the forces of evil, as good guys versus bad guys. The behavior of people and institutions in any given era is a function of the prevailing values of the times in which they lived, and should be evaluated according to those contemporary standards. One cannot take the values of twenty first-century Western society, and impose them backwards to the fifteenth, sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, which represented a less-enlightened, less ecumenical age. The expulsion and forced conversion of the Jews of was a function of a certain mind set prevalent in Spain at the turn of the sixteenth century. Contemplation of any such persecution would, of course, be unthinkable in our society today, but was not abnormal by Western European standards five hundred years ago. It was precisely the recognition of this historical process that Dr. Perko recognized, and he took advantage of his expertise of the history of the Catholic Church to share with us his analysis of the transformation of its policy toward the Jews over the course of the past five centuries.

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies was formed eleven years ago to foster the study of crypto-Judaism in various parts of the Iberian world. The Society does not support or endorse any particular religion, either Judaism or Catholicism. It recognizes that among its diverse constituency, there is a wide variety of views and perspectives on theology. More importantly, it recognizes that among the descendants of the anusim, some will choose to remain Catholic or Protestant, or otherwise validate their Christianity. The Society needs to allow them positive space to do so, in the same way that it gives such space to those who wish to affirm their Judaism.

The Society's conferences and newsletter have been, and should continue to be a forum for a vigorous exchange of intellectual views. If we disagree with each other, let's debate the issues, but we must do so in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect.

**Stanley M. Hordes**, PhD, Professor  
University of New Mexico

**Seth D. Kunin**, PhD, Professor  
University of Aberdeen

#### Dear Editor:

I was very sorry that the letter from Arye Hazary was included in the last issue of *HaLapid*. This letter, and certain comments expressed during the conference were totally unwarranted. I enjoyed listening to Michael Perko at the conference and to reading his remarks in *HaLapid*. I believe that he made a very important presentation on the new and positive relationship being developed between the Jewish community and the Catholic Church. I also believe that his remarks concerning the crypto-Jewish community were important and helpful.

As a rabbi, in many communities both in the United States and in Europe, I have found the modern Catholic Church to be the Christian church most ready to enter inter-faith dialogue with the Jewish community and to seek new understandings and relationships that fit the needs of the modern world. While I don't believe that we can forget the past, I also do not believe that it should shape relationships in the present. Religious communities need to communicate and learn to respect each other, and I believe that Michael has taken many steps -- including at our conference last summer, to help in this process.

I hope that *HaLapid* and the Society in general will support the concept of diversity and understanding rather than isolationism, fear and even hate.

**David Kunin**, Rabbi

Congregation Ohr Shalom, San Diego

#### Book Review: *The Conquistadores and Crypto Jews of Monterrey*

Most members of the SCJS are familiar with the story of Luis de Carvajal, the first governor of Nuevo León, Mexico. But, the connection of Jews to colonial Mexico goes far beyond the Carvajal family. David Raphael has produced a masterful study of the topic. Raphael is already known for his earlier books including the novels, *The Alhambra Decree* and *The Cavalier of Malaga*; the anthology, *The Expulsion 1492 Chronicles* and his film, *The Song of The Sephardi*.

The new book takes us back to the massacres of 1391, follows Cortés on his conquests and gives us a review of the Chichimecas and Tlascalans. But, most important, it presents the remarkable saga of the Crypto Jews in Mexico. Here we see the Carvajal family secretly "judaizing," being tortured, tried and executed.

The expedition of Gaspar Castaño de Sosa into New Mexico is covered, including excerpts from the daily log. We learn of Alberto Del Canto, the founder of Saltillo and Diego de Montemayor, founder of Monterrey. Special emphasis is given to important *converso* families, such as the Garzas of Monterrey and the Martinez of Marin. These families become more than just names as we see the faces of their descendants in old photographs.

David Raphael's research has resulted in a valuable resource for all of us who are involved with the Society For Crypto Judaic Studies. See: [www.carmihouse.com](http://www.carmihouse.com) for ordering information or contact Carmi House, P.O. Box 4796, Valley Village, CA 91617

*Reviewed by Arthur Benveniste*



Continued from page 5

everything I questioned so I stopped asking.

13. There was always soaking of the meat and salting with kosher salt and constant rinsing.

14. Blood and water were taken outside and buried.

15. A nerve or vein was pulled out from meat or poultry.

16. We would spend Christmas time with family in El Paso. There were candles but no Christmas trees in the houses.

17. The women would make a desert for the kids called *bunuelos* which my mom makes to this day. Flour, water and cinnamon is mixed into these flat tortilla shapes and dried. Then they are fried in olive oil only and sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar. Oranges and nuts are served too.

18. We sang songs about the Cavritico (baby goat/kid), which we sang, near some water in the spring; also songs about a hole of a needle in the sky that *Maestro Padre* looked down on us through.

19. A strange nickname my Grandmother called me, "Yudi" and my brother was called "Nuni."

20. My dad always would wear a fedora, it was a small hat. He had a gray one and black one.

21. We never had religious statues in our home.

22. My mother and aunts would play a game called "Toma Todo" for pennies. It looked like a *dreidel*.

23. Having *tefillin*.

24. An old tallit with no corner fringes. I think it belonged to my grandfather. My mom wouldn't give it to me.

25. The designs on family grave stones were six pointed lilies. No saints.

26. A family history of always running as if being chased.

Here is a sample of one of the weird rhymes my mother would say that her mother had told her. They are always sung. Some of the words are different from Spanish of today.

Estava un gadito senando, Se pago el candil

No e yava por salid Cordio con su cormadre

Comadre comadre pr tame su burra blanka

Que me voy a Salamanka.

El Salamanka se contro una monita que de seeya Ten te lon,

Ten te lon, Mureta se eyvon en un cahon,

Como la cahon eda de lana, Mureto te eyvan a la casa de Juana

Como Juana eda bonita, Mureta te eyvon con la coorita

Como la coorita eda Santo, Murita se eyvon a la composanto

Como la composanto eda de yeso, Mureto te eyvon a comed chesso

Como el chesso eda de vaca, Mureto te eyvon a comed caca.

It is just one of the many strange little songs they told us. The word *coorito* means "priest." She said "priest" was not "padre."

*Norma Waggoner* phoned Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel in Los Angeles because she suspected Jewish Roots. She was referred to SCJS President Arthur Benveniste, who asked her to write this article.

#### FLAVIO MONTOYA'S TRANSLATION OF THE POEM

SCJS board member **Flavio Montoya** has translated the above poem and added an explanation of some of the words.

There was a little man from Cadiz (un gado is a person from Cadiz)

Eating his dinner

When his candle went out.

He could not find his way out.

He ran to his *comadre*

## CONFERENCE PLANNED

### ON PORTUGUESE JEWS

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum, *HaLapid* contributor and SCJS 2001 conference speaker, is organizing a Conference on Portuguese Jews in Lisbon, June 9-17. The program includes several Society members. Partial listing of speakers and topics follows.

Rabbi Leo Abrami, History of Portuguese Jews

Richard Zimler, author, *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*

Art Benveniste, historian, Crypto-Jews of Brazil

Judith Cohen, ethnomusicologist, recital and report on research of Iberian Jewish culture

Laura Cesana, artist and author, *Vestigios Herbraicos em Portugal*; studio tour

Inacio Steinhardt, Portuguese researcher on crypto Jews

Dolores Sloan, researcher and writer, Do a Gracia and Abraham Zacuto

Visits to Belmonte and other significant sites in Jewish Portugal are also planned. For further information, see <http://www.saudades.org> or write [rufina@saudades.org](mailto:rufina@saudades.org).

## WORKSHOP ON MARRANOS

### AND MASONS

#### EXPLORES LINK BETWEEN TWO

An international research workshop on "Marranos and Masons" will be held April 9-10, in Ashkelon, Israel, sponsored by Casa Shalom Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies, Gan Yavneh, Israel and the Sheffield, England, Centre for Research Into Freemasonry. Participants will assess the research overlap between the two areas of study, according to Gloria Mound, Casa Shalom Director.

Over the past two centuries, crypto Jews within Spain and in the anusim diaspora have found involvement with Masonic groups valuable in their defense and in providing secular networks for advancement and integration.

For further information, contact [rabortnic@aol.com](mailto:rabortnic@aol.com)

## UNM TO PUBLISH ALEXY BOOK

### ON CRYPTO-JEWISH PRIEST

Trudi Alexy's new book, *The Marrano Legacy: A Present-Day Crypto-Jew discloses secrets Of His double-Life As A Catholic Priest*, has just been accepted for publication by the University of New Mexico Press, due out in spring, 2003. At SCJS's 1999 conference in Los Angeles, Alexy spoke on her email correspondence with the subject of her book.

#### CORRECTION

The last issue of *HaLapid* carried an article by Kathleen Alcal , *A Thread in the Tapestry— the Narros of Saltillo Mexico, in History and Literature*. Her mother, Lydia Narro was born in Durango, Durango, Mexico, not Durango, CO. We apologize, Kathleen.



king largely through the influence of Ferrer. Although the kings had historically defended the rights of Jews, now they were largely co-opted by the Church. The Jewish communities of Castile, Aragón, and Cataluña were powerless at this point without the protection of the monarchs, largely as a result of the influence of Ferrer and the Pope. Jews were marginalized by the new anti-Semitic laws, and the Debate of Tortosa sealed their fate as an outcast community. While the rabbis were sequestered for the long debate, Ferrer traveled from town to town preaching against the Jews. In 1415, Pope Benedict XIII issued a papal bull prohibiting the reading and teaching of the Talmud. All copies of the Talmud were to be confiscated and taken to the diocese of each town, and all other Jewish books were prohibited. Only one synagogue was permitted per town, and synagogues could not be expanded or repaired. Vicente Ferrer and Pope Benedict XIII shared the common goal of eradicating Judaism in Aragón and Castile, and they were on the verge of achieving it.

When all seemed lost, there was a reprieve for the Jewish communities. In 1416, the authority of Pope Benedict XIII was revoked, and in the same year King Fernando I died. With those two out of authority, Ferrer lost his political influence and his projection as preacher and religious activist declined. Three years later in 1419, Ferrer died in the town of Vannes, France on a trip to evangelize Celtic descent Bretons whom he thought to be slack in their practice of Christianity, and the anti-Semitic forces lost their most persuasive preacher. Ferrer was eventually canonized by the Church and credited for the conversion of 15,000 Jews to Christianity. Others say that he may have caused as many as 25,000 conversions during his decades of preaching, and he is almost definitely responsible for more forced conversions than any other single individual in Spain. Later a church in Vannes was named after St. Vicente Ferrer, and today it continues to bear his name and preserve a relic of the saint. Throughout Europe and the Americas there are many churches, streets, and landmarks named in honor of St. Vincent or San Vicente in spite of his history of anti-Semitism. This raises the question whether the cult to an anti-Semitic leader of the past can be differentiated from the anti-Semitism for which he is known.

Ferrer took the low road of stirring up the masses with fiery sermons that launched them on assaults against Jews, and he was willing to accept intimidation as a tactic to force Jews to convert to Christianity. He was also against Muslims and used the same rhetoric against them, but Muslims were more rural, lived in dispersed patterns, and had a lower social visibility than the Jews. By and large, Muslims escaped the wrath of the mobs, but the more accessible, urban Jewish neighborhoods suffered the brunt of it. As Ferrer stirred the masses against the Jews, his friend and collaborator Pope Benedict XIII, applied pressure from his position of power to issue bulls and persuade kings against them. The pincer movement applied by these two anti-Semitic Christian leaders was a plan for the final elimination of Jews from Spain, failing only when their authority and power collapsed in 1416.

Ferrer was the architect of the use of intimidation to force Jews to convert to Christianity. This leader of the early fifteenth century Church in Spain used the threatening masses as an instrument of evangelization, apparently on the justification that the ends justified the means. The choice for Jews was

frequently either convert or see their life, family, and community destroyed. Although Ferrer's efforts between 1390 and 1419 did not eliminate Judaism in Spain, he gave impetus to a process that continued over the next several decades until the Edict of Expulsion was issued in 1492. Expulsion was the ultimate weapon to coerce Jews to convert or leave Spain, and it represented the culmination of Spanish anti-Semitism. The followers of Ferrer finally accomplished through King Fernando and Queen Isabella what he set out to do 100 years before, eliminating the visible presence of Jews and practice of Judaism from Spain. However, as crypto-Jewish families know today 600 years later, the strategy of intimidation used by St. Vicente Ferrer was more successful in creating terror than in forcing people to abandon the foundations of their faith.

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**Ronald J. Duncan**, is an anthropologist who has lived and published primarily in Latin America, currently living in the United States. He has conducted extensive research in Spain on the coexistence of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian cultures.

The choice for Jews was frequently either convert or see their life, family, and community destroyed.

"*Comadre comadre*"

Loan me your white burro  
Cause I'm going to Salamanca.  
In Salamanca he met a monkey  
Who was saying,  
"Ten te lon, ten te lon".  
Mureta climbed into a box,  
But as the box was made of wool,  
Mureta went to Juana's house.  
As Juana was pretty,  
Mureta went to look for a priest.  
As the priest was holy,  
Mureta went to the cemetery.  
As the cemetery was full of marble,  
Mureta sent you to eat cheese.  
As the cheese was made of milk,  
Mureta sent you to eat caca.

Some words;

**Gadito-** In old Spanish a person from the city of Cadiz was called a *gado*.

**Comadre-** This relationship has no equivalent in English but is widely used even today in all latin countries. In French it is *comere*, in Italian it is *cumare* and in Spanish it is *comadre*.

**Salamanca-**capital of the province of Leon.

**Eyvon-**A form of "to be" This word is probably extinct today. It is used in New Mexico Ladino and is pronounced *aivan*. I have not heard it used any where else.

**Mureta-** In old Spanish a *mureto* was a dark skinned person and is called a *morena* or *moreno* in modern Spanish.

**Camposanto-** Cemetery, as used today in New Mexico.

**Yeso** is a soft stone used for carving statues and the equivalent today is probably plaster of paris. The word *yeso* is used figuratively in the poem and refers to the grave markers made of marble or some like material and probably because it rhymes with *queso* or *chesso* as they say in the poem.

**Caca-**Self explanatory.

## THE SOCIETY FOR CRYPTO-JUDAIC STUDIES SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

August 11 to 13, 2002

### CALL FOR PAPERS

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies is soliciting papers for presentation to its Twelfth Annual Conference on a variety of topics dealing with Crypto-Jewish history and culture. If you are actively engaged in research on such a topic and wish to exchange ideas with other members of the Society, we would very much welcome your participation. You need not be a published scholar to take part – the Society actively solicits presentations from members of the anusim community who have experiences that they would like to share with the group.

Please send an abstract of your presentation by May  
15 to: Dr. Stanley Hordes  
Smhordes@aol.com

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*HaLapid* contributors come from all over the world. The editors respect different national writing styles and, where possible, have left each item in the author's style. We edit for grammar, spelling and typographical error.

Many contributions are memoirs or retelling of family stories and legends. They may or may not be historically accurate, although they are indeed valid, sacred memories that have been passed along through time. We do not attempt to change individual perceptions as long as they are reported as such, but we do change obvious misstatements or historical error.

We reserve the right to edit any material. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of SCJS or *HaLapid*. Articles from *HaLapid* may not be reprinted without permission.

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***We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!  
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